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BLACK WIDOW

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THE COLDEST WAR

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EPIC COLLECTION

BLACK WIDOW

THE COLDEST WAR

VOLUME 2

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BIZARRE ADVENTURES #25, MARVEL FANFARE #10-13, SOLO AVENGERS #7,
BLACK WIDOW: THE COLDEST WAR, PUNISHER/BLACK WIDOW: SPINNING DOOMSDAY'S WEB,
DAREDEVIL/BLACK WIDOW: ABATTOIR, MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #135,
DAREDEVIL ANNUAL #10, FURY/BLACK WIDOW: DEATH DUTY and **JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #517-519**

BLACK WIDOW

THE COLDEST WAR

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THE BLACK WIDOW AND DAREDEVIL

Soon after the Black Widow's first encounter with Daredevil (in *Daredevil* #81), their paths crossed again. She joined him in a battle in which she inadvertently caused the villainous Scorpion to fall to his death — or so it seemed. Natasha faced trial for murder, with Matt Murdock as her defense attorney — and his best friend, District Attorney Franklin "Foggy" Nelson, prosecuting. But, with the trial ultimately dismissed, romance blossomed between Natasha and Matt — as planned all along by the android Assassin, who had been sent from the future to manipulate recent events in service to his master, Baal. With the Assassin defeated, Matt revealed his dual identity as Daredevil to the Widow, and they began both a professional and personal relationship — to the initial disapproval of her fatherly chauffeur, Ivan.

Matt and Natasha fought foes including Gladiator and Electro, but, while their costumed partnership proved successful — from issue #92-107 (October 1972-January 1974), the series bore the cover logo *Daredevil and the Black Widow* — their love life was far more volatile. Matt's head was turned by his former girlfriend, Karen Page, but he quickly returned to the Widow. Together they sought a fresh life in San Francisco, where Natasha sank the last of her inheritance into a year's lease on a luxury mansion. She planned to build a new civilian career in fashion design, but it never came to fruition — and meanwhile, she and her lover faced fresh challenges, not least a ghost from her past. Danny French was an ally from Natasha's spy days, who once joined her on an ill-fated mission to steal the mysterious Project Four. She and French were reunited when a man named Damon Dran sought to seize Project Four's incredible powers for his own, transforming himself into the Indestructible Man. Together, the Widow, Daredevil and French managed to stop him—at the cost of French's life.

The Widow's old flame, Hawkeye, arrived on the scene, seeking to rekindle their romance, but the chauvinistic sparring between him and Daredevil led the strong-willed Natasha to prefer an offer to join the Avengers over either of them. However, she soon returned to San Francisco and resumed her on-off relationship with DD as they fought threats including Stilt-Man and Kraven the Hunter. But a mutual attraction between Daredevil and the enigmatic Moondragon placed further strain on the turbulent couple.

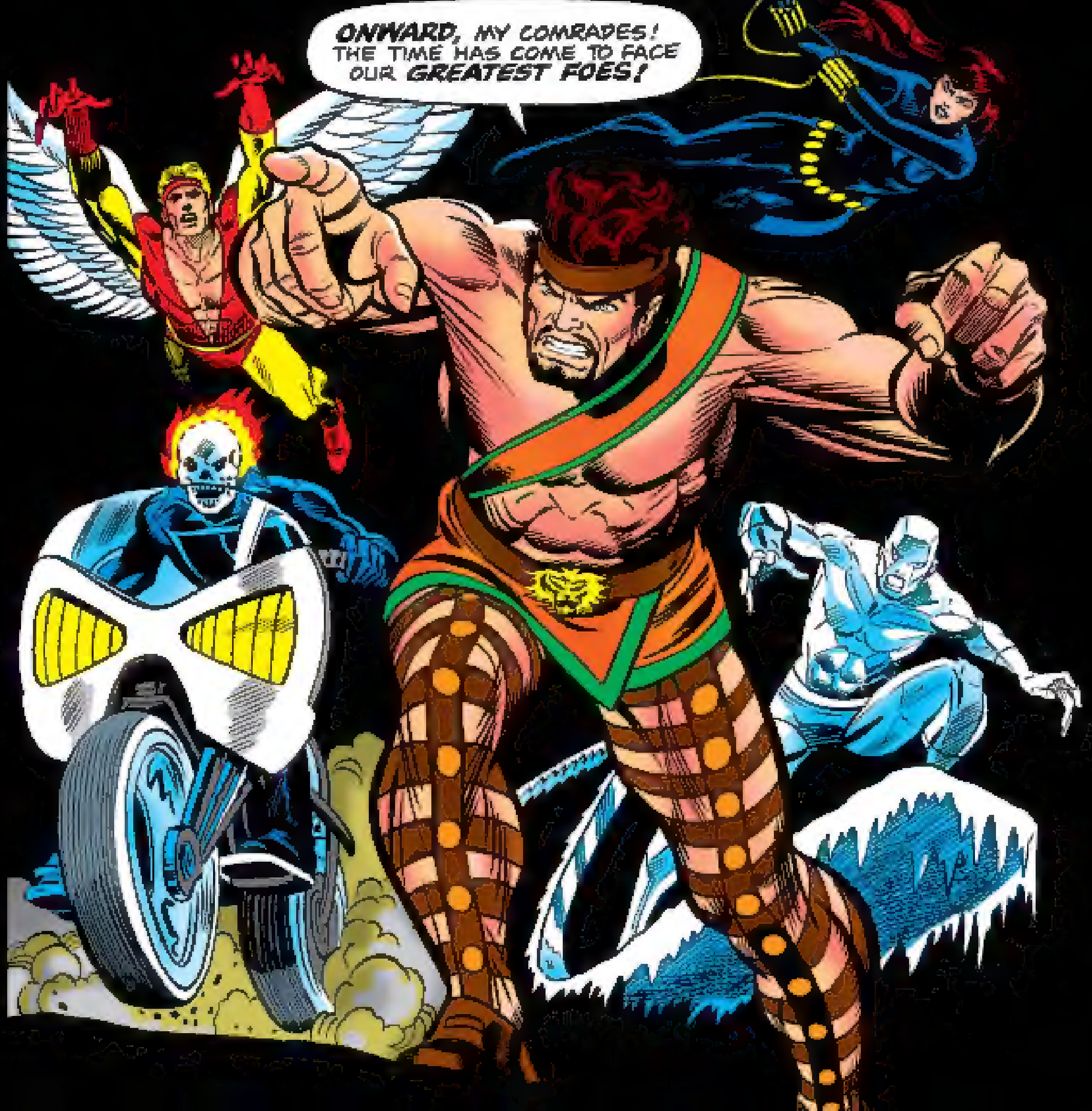
As Matt returned to New York to care for a wounded Foggy Nelson, it seemed things were over. Matt and Natasha's feelings had gotten the better of them, time after time. They really did love each other—but sometimes, love isn't enough. The woman who was once the world's deadliest spy felt she was losing her strong, independent self as the crimefighting partner of an overprotective Daredevil. The Black Widow is no sidekick…and so, at last, she had to say goodbye. With her lease up, her Rolls-Royce sold and all her money gone, Natasha and Ivan headed off for the next, uncertain chapter of their lives.

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

Natasha's search for gainful employment brought her and Ivan to the University of California, Los Angeles — but her application to teach Russian was rudely interrupted by the mythical machinations of Pluto. The Greek god's targets were Venus (in the mortal guise of the university's humanities professor) and Hercules (visiting, coincidentally, as a guest lecturer) — but Pluto didn't reckon on Black Widow, two UCLA students who used to be X-Men, Angel and Iceman, and Ghost Rider, who just happened to be roaring by. Together, the unlikely assemblage thwarted Pluto's plans — and thereafter agreed to band together as the Champions! Funded by Angel, a.k.a. the wealthy Warren Worthington III, their mission statement was to be heroes for the common man.

Despite the misgivings of Ivan, who felt the independent Natasha would suffer the same way she did with the Avengers and Daredevil, the Widow showed natural leadership qualities in battle with the armored Rampage, and was quickly anointed team leader. But once again, her past would cause trouble for her and those closest to her when the Titanium Man captured both her and her former teacher, the ex-Russian KGB chief Alexi Bruskin, known as the Commissar. The plot was masterminded by the new Crimson Dynamo, Yuri Petrovich, who was out to return defectors to the U.S.S.R. — including his own father, Ivan! Yuri grew up believing Ivan had abandoned him, but, in fact, the boy had been stolen after his mother's death. Ivan helped the Champions track Yuri down, but, in the final conflict, the Commissar was killed and the Crimson Dynamo escaped. Soon after, Ivan elected to leave Natasha's side, in a bid to find his son and convince him of the truth — or so he claimed.

The team's efforts to get fully up and running with an advanced headquarters and flying craft met with disaster again and again. Following straining encounters with villains including the Stranger, Swarm and even Magneto and Doctor Doom, the uneasy alliance between these wildly different heroes could hold no longer. The Champions disbanded, and the Black Widow left with Hercules, with whom she had shared the first flickers of attraction. Together, Natasha and Herc were summoned by the Avengers to join a truly mighty roster during the cosmic Korvac Saga. She was then brought crashing back into the world of Daredevil when she was targeted by his psychotic nemesis, Bullseye. But, her days of being a supporting player in the lives of other heroes and super-teams were done. It was time for the Black Widow to command her own destiny once more…


ONWARD, MY COMRADES! THE TIME HAS COME TO FACE OUR GREATEST FOES!

BY JESS HARROLD

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BIZARRE ADVENTURES

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THE BLACK WIDOW

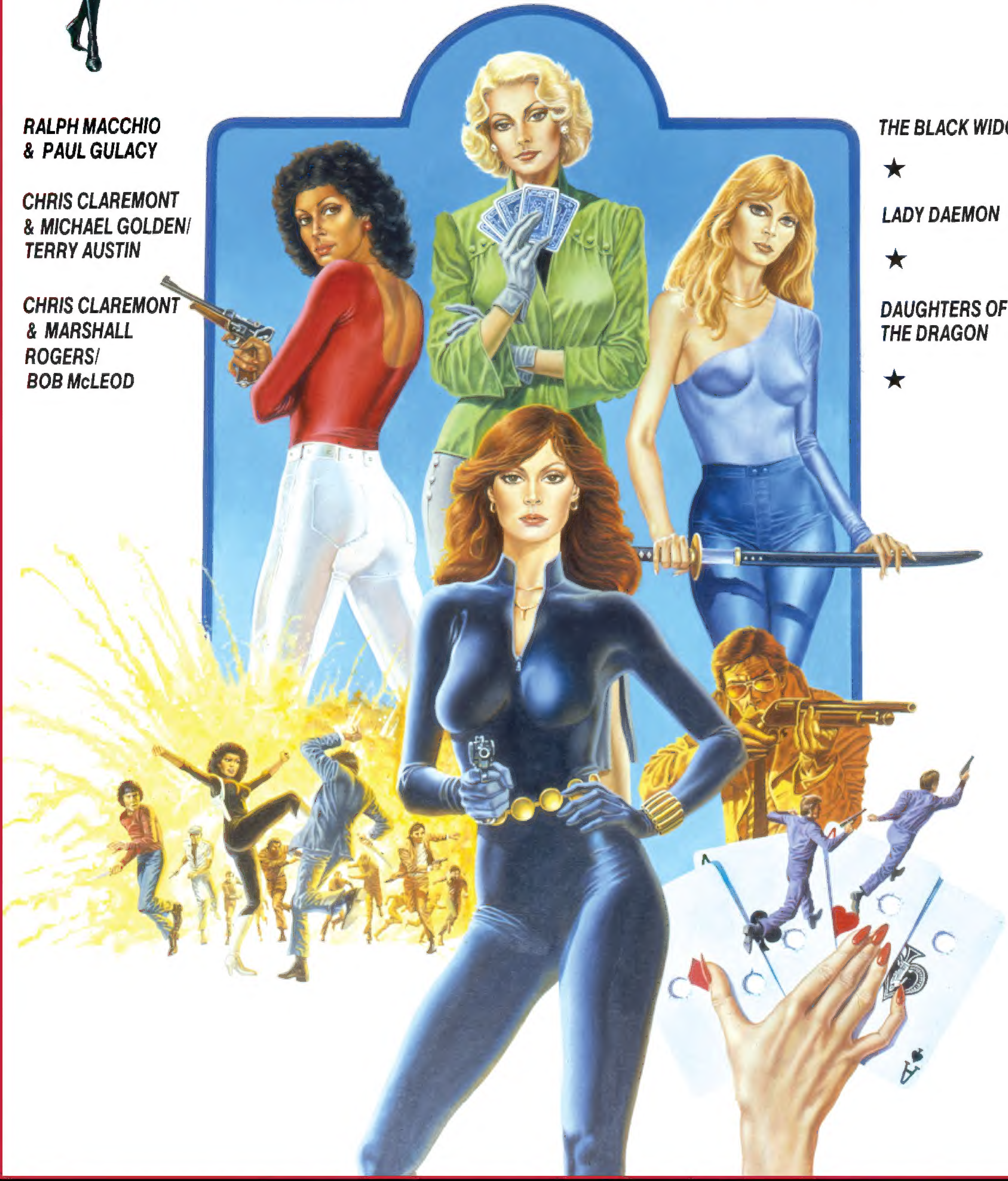
★

LADY DAEMON

★

DAUGHTERS OF
THE DRAGON

★



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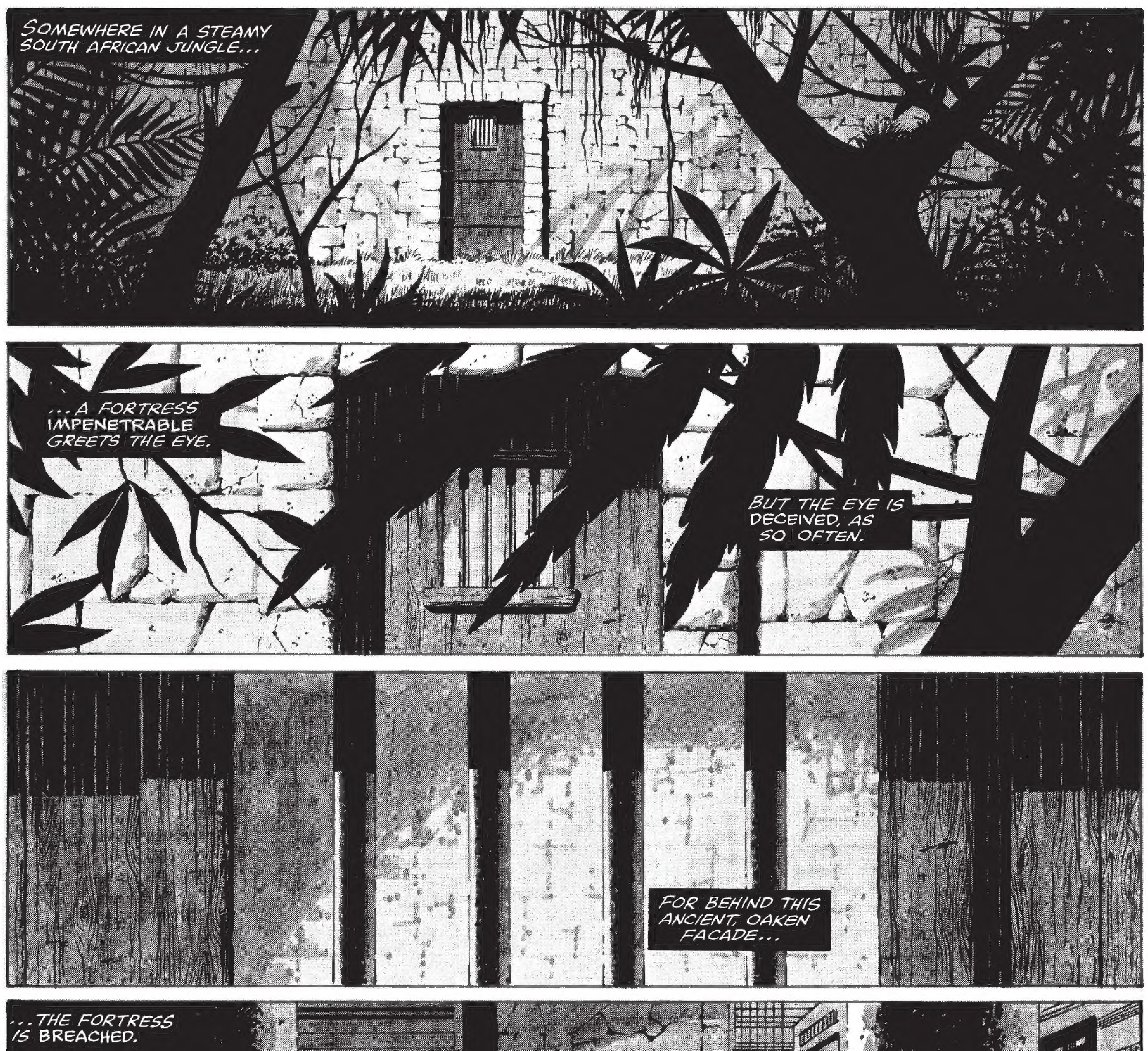
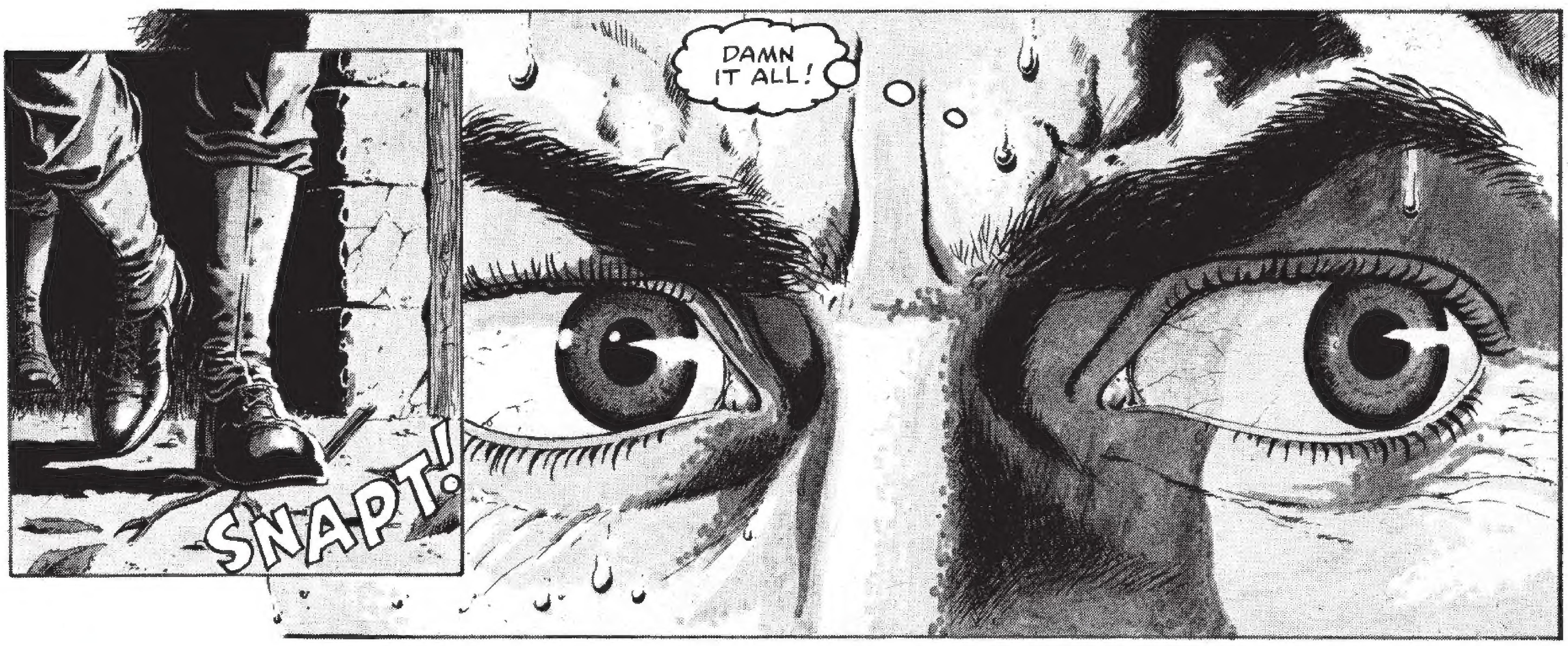
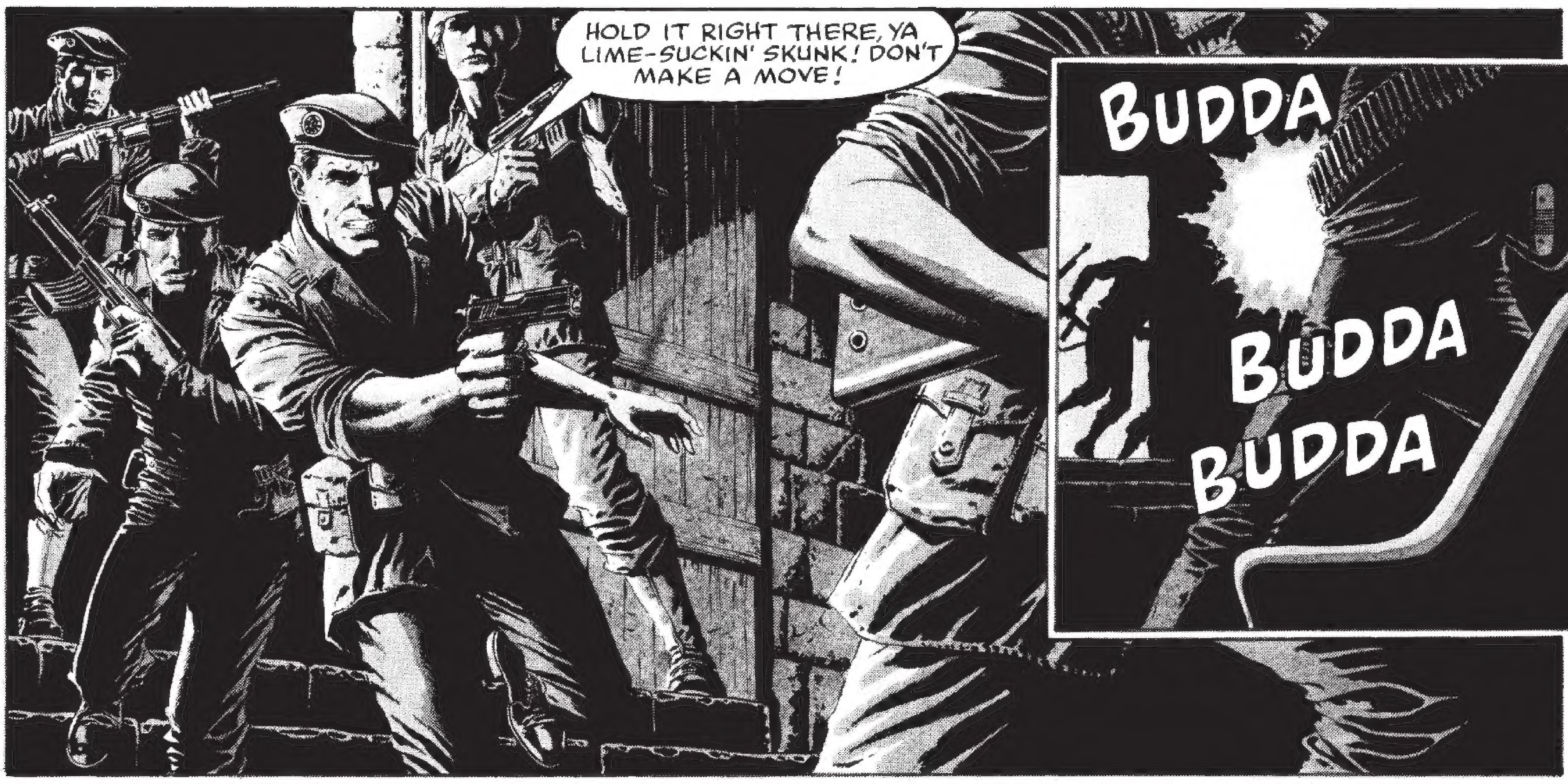
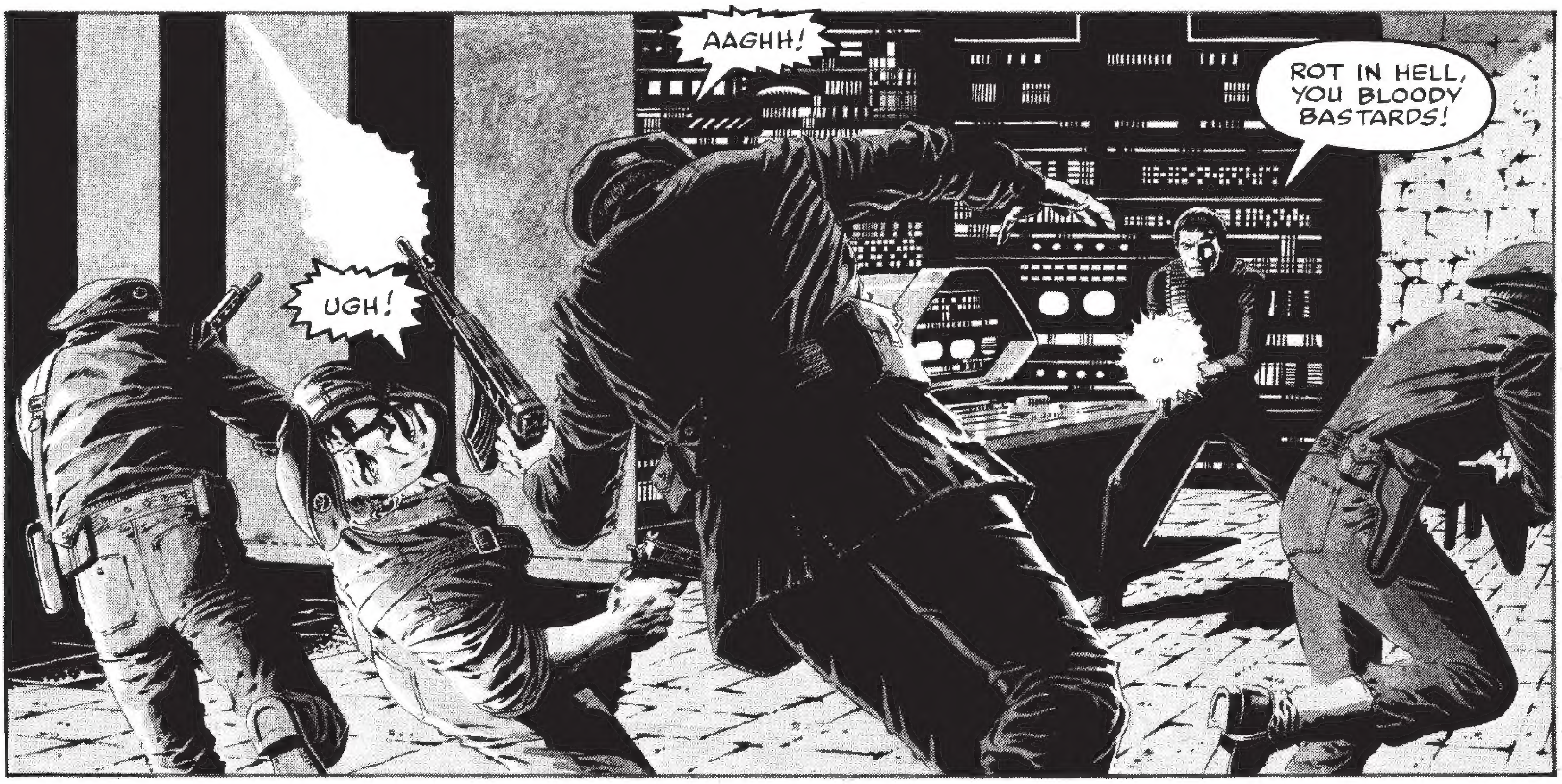
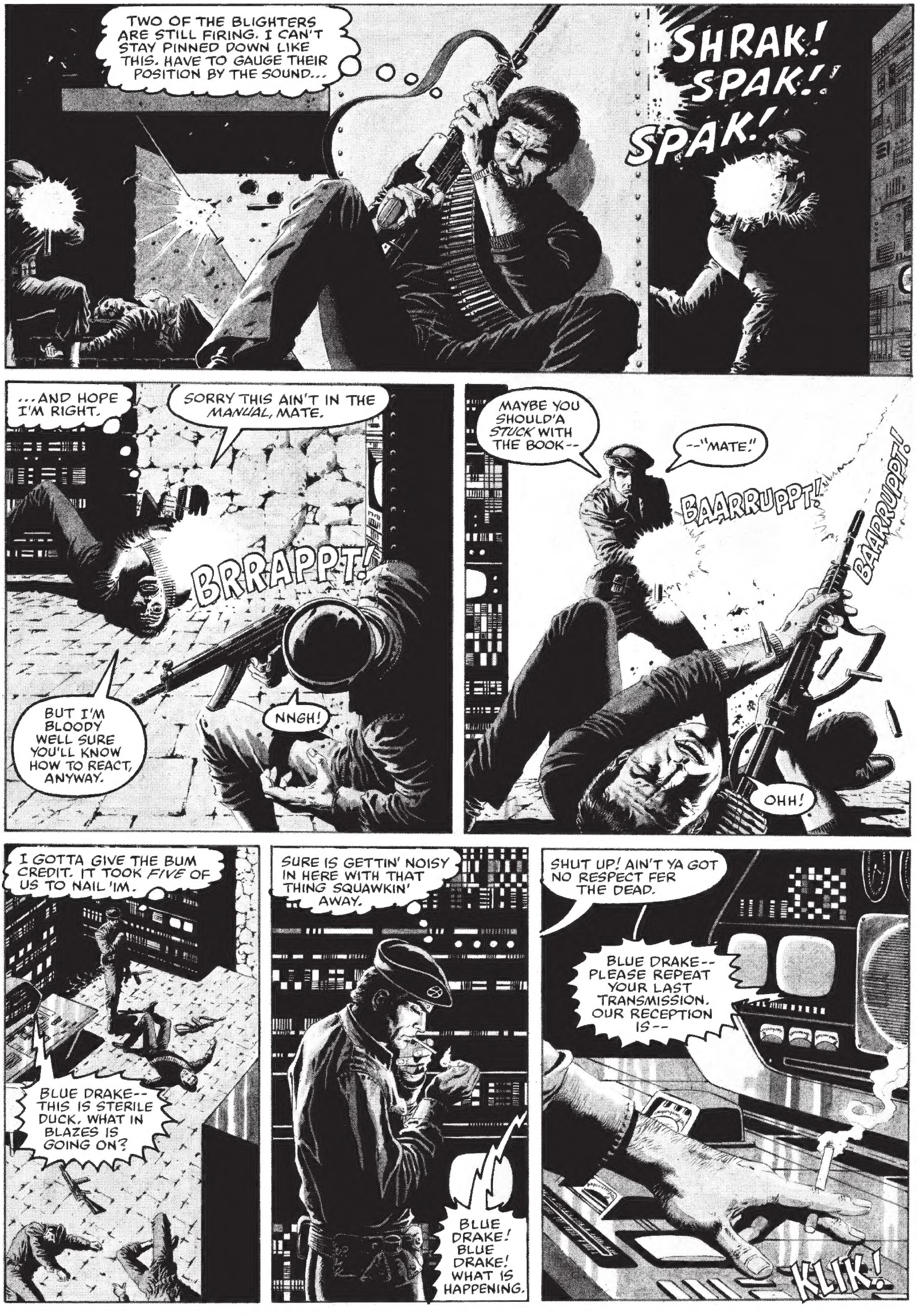

SOMEWHERE IN A STEAMY SOUTH AFRICAN JUNGLE...
...A FORTRESS IMPENETRABLE GREETS THE EYE.
BUT THE EYE IS DECEIVED, AS SO OFTEN.
FOR BEHIND THIS ANCIENT, OAKEN FACADE...
...THE FORTRESS IS BREACHED.
--MUCH MORE TO TELL YOU, STERILE DUCK: BLUE DRAKE HAS COMPLETED INFILTRATION.
AND THE PIGEON HAS BEEN BAGGED. REPEAT: THE PIGEON HAS BEEN BAGGED.
THE TRANSMISSION'S BEGINNING TO BREAK UP. SOME OTHER FREQUENCY IS STARTING TO JAM IT. I HAVE TO RELAY THIS HASTILY.
ALSO, BLUE DRAKE HAS RECEIVED CONFIRMATION THAT THE BISHOP IS SINGING. I SAID--


SNAPT!
DAMN IT ALL!


HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, YA LIME-SUCKIN' SKUNK! DON'T MAKE A MOVE!
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA

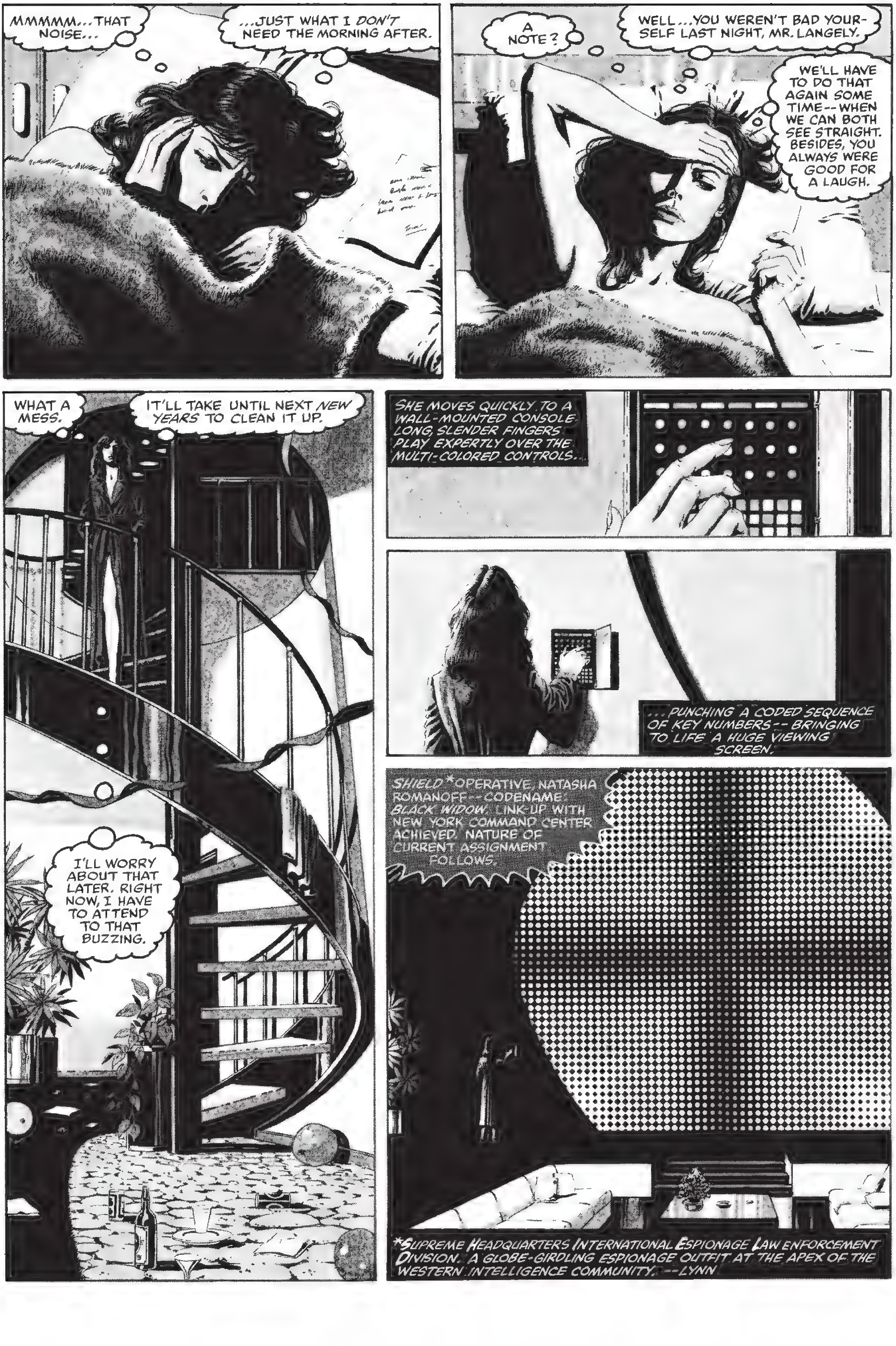

AAGHH!
ROT IN HELL, YOU BLOODY BASTARDS!
UGH!

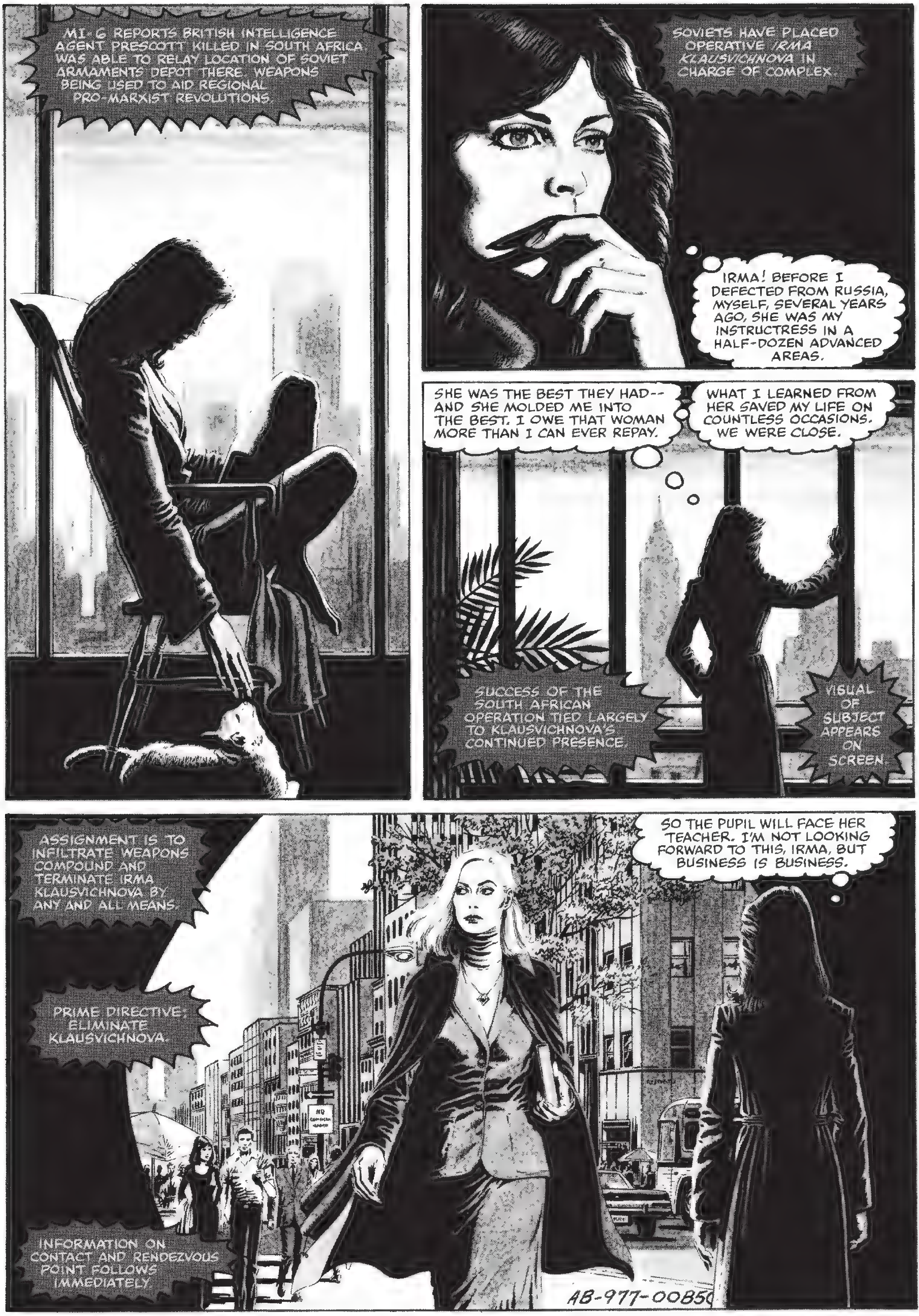

TWO OF THE BLIGHTERS ARE STILL FIRING. I CAN'T STAY PINNED DOWN LIKE THIS. HAVE TO GAUGE THEIR POSITION BY THE SOUND...
SHRAK! SPAK! SPAK!
...AND HOPE I'M RIGHT.
SORRY THIS AIN'T IN THE *MANUAL*, MATE.
BRRAPPT!
BUT I'M BLOODY WELL SURE YOU'LL KNOW HOW TO REACT, ANYWAY.
NNGH!
MAYBE YOU SHOULD'A *STUCK* WITH THE BOOK--
--"MATE."
BAARRUPPT!
BAARRUPPT!
OHH!
I GOTTA GIVE THE BUM CREDIT. IT TOOK *FIVE* OF US TO NAIL 'IM.
BLUE DRAKE-- THIS IS STERILE DUCK. WHAT IN BLAZES IS GOING ON?
SURE IS GETTIN' NOISY IN HERE WITH THAT THING SQUAWKIN' AWAY.
BLUE DRAKE! BLUE DRAKE! WHAT IS HAPPENING.
SHUT UP! AIN'T YA GOT NO RESPECT FER THE DEAD.
BLUE DRAKE-- PLEASE REPEAT YOUR LAST TRANSMISSION. OUR RECEPTION IS--
KLIK!

the BLACK WIDOW in I GOT THE YO-YO... YOU GOT THE STRING

SHAFTS OF SUNLIGHT PASS THROUGH THE PENTHOUSE WINDOWS...
...BUT THE APARTMENT'S LONE OCCUPANT IS BLISSFULLY UNAWARE OF DAWN'S GOLDEN RAYS--
--UNTIL THE INCESSANT SOUND OF AN UNANSWERED BUZZER...
...RETURNS NATASHA ROMANOFF TO UNWANTED AWARENESS.
Royal
RUSSOFF VODKA

WRITING: RALPH MACCHIO ART: PAUL GULACY


MMMMM... THAT NOISE...
...JUST WHAT I *DON'T* NEED THE MORNING AFTER.
A NOTE?
WELL...YOU WEREN'T BAD YOURSELF LAST NIGHT, MR. LANGELY.
WE'LL HAVE TO DO THAT AGAIN SOME TIME--WHEN WE CAN BOTH SEE STRAIGHT. BESIDES, YOU ALWAYS WERE GOOD FOR A LAUGH.
WHAT A MESS.
IT'LL TAKE UNTIL NEXT *NEW YEARS* TO CLEAN IT UP.
I'LL WORRY ABOUT THAT LATER. RIGHT NOW, I HAVE TO ATTEND TO THAT BUZZING.
SHE MOVES QUICKLY TO A WALL-MOUNTED CONSOLE. LONG, SLENDER FINGERS PLAY EXPERTLY OVER THE MULTI-COLORED CONTROLS...
...PUNCHING A CODED SEQUENCE OF KEY NUMBERS--BRINGING TO LIFE A HUGE VIEWING SCREEN.
*SHIELD** OPERATIVE, NATASHA ROMANOFF--CODENAME *BLACK WIDOW*. LINK-UP WITH NEW YORK COMMAND CENTER ACHIEVED. NATURE OF CURRENT ASSIGNMENT FOLLOWS.
*SUPREME HEADQUARTERS INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION. A GLOBE-GIRDLING ESPIONAGE OUTFIT AT THE APEX OF THE WESTERN INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY. --LYNN


MI-6 REPORTS BRITISH INTELLIGENCE AGENT PRESCOTT KILLED IN SOUTH AFRICA WAS ABLE TO RELAY LOCATION OF SOVIET ARMAMENTS DEPOT THERE. WEAPONS BEING USED TO AID REGIONAL PRO-MARXIST REVOLUTIONS.
SOVIETS HAVE PLACED OPERATIVE *IRMA KLAUSVICHNOVA* IN CHARGE OF COMPLEX.
IRMA! BEFORE I DEFECTED FROM RUSSIA, MYSELF, SEVERAL YEARS AGO, SHE WAS MY INSTRUCTRESS IN A HALF-DOZEN ADVANCED AREAS.
SHE WAS THE BEST THEY HAD-- AND SHE MOLDED ME INTO THE BEST. I OWE THAT WOMAN MORE THAN I CAN EVER REPAY.
WHAT I LEARNED FROM HER SAVED MY LIFE ON COUNTLESS OCCASIONS. WE WERE CLOSE.
SUCCESS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN OPERATION TIED LARGELY TO KLAUSVICHNOVA'S CONTINUED PRESENCE.
VISUAL OF SUBJECT APPEARS ON SCREEN.
ASSIGNMENT IS TO INFILTRATE WEAPONS COMPOUND AND TERMINATE IRMA KLAUSVICHNOVA BY ANY AND ALL MEANS.
SO THE PUPIL WILL FACE HER TEACHER. I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS, IRMA, BUT BUSINESS IS BUSINESS.
PRIME DIRECTIVE: ELIMINATE KLAUSVICHNOVA.
INFORMATION ON CONTACT AND RENDEZVOUS POINT FOLLOWS IMMEDIATELY.
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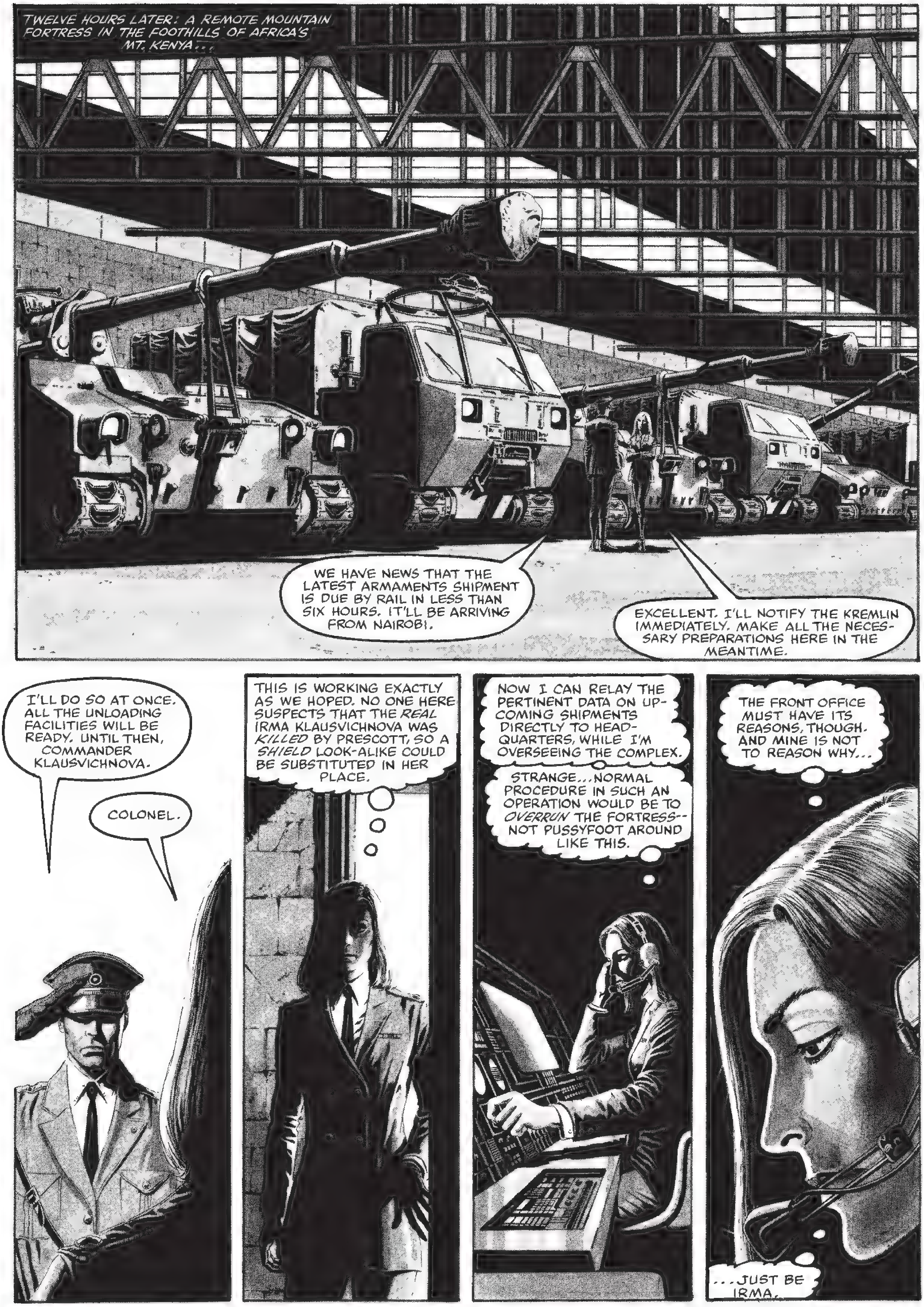
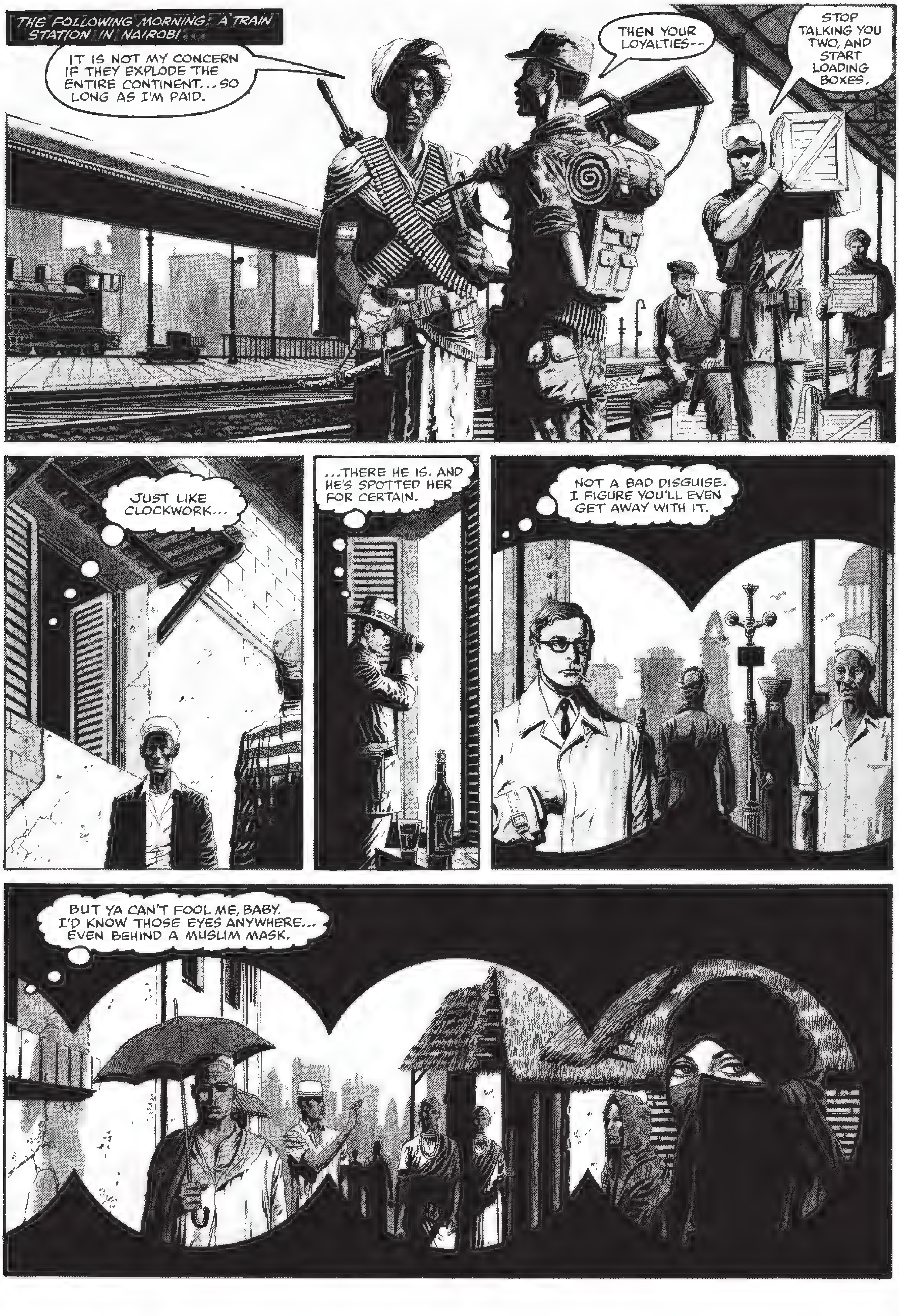
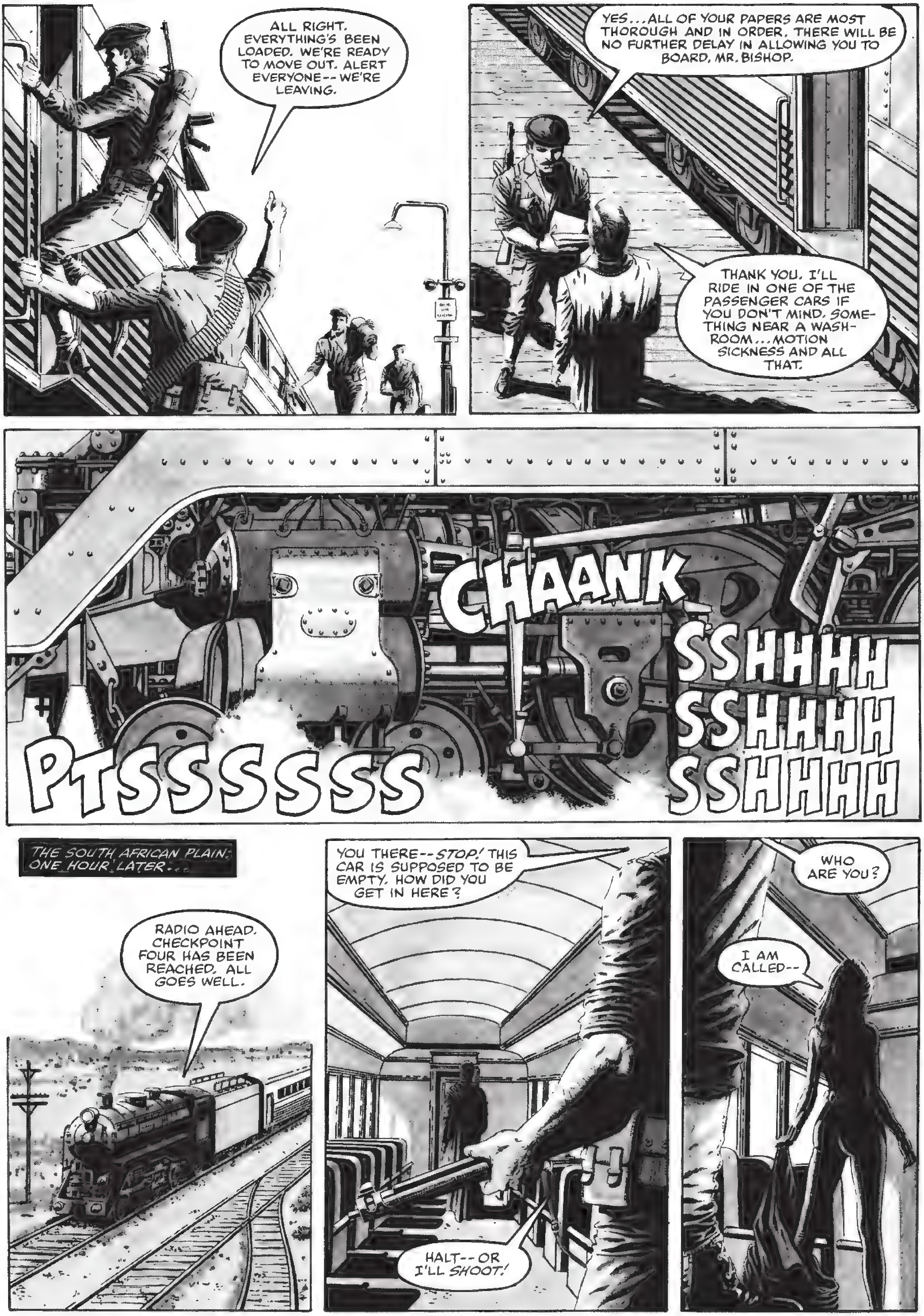
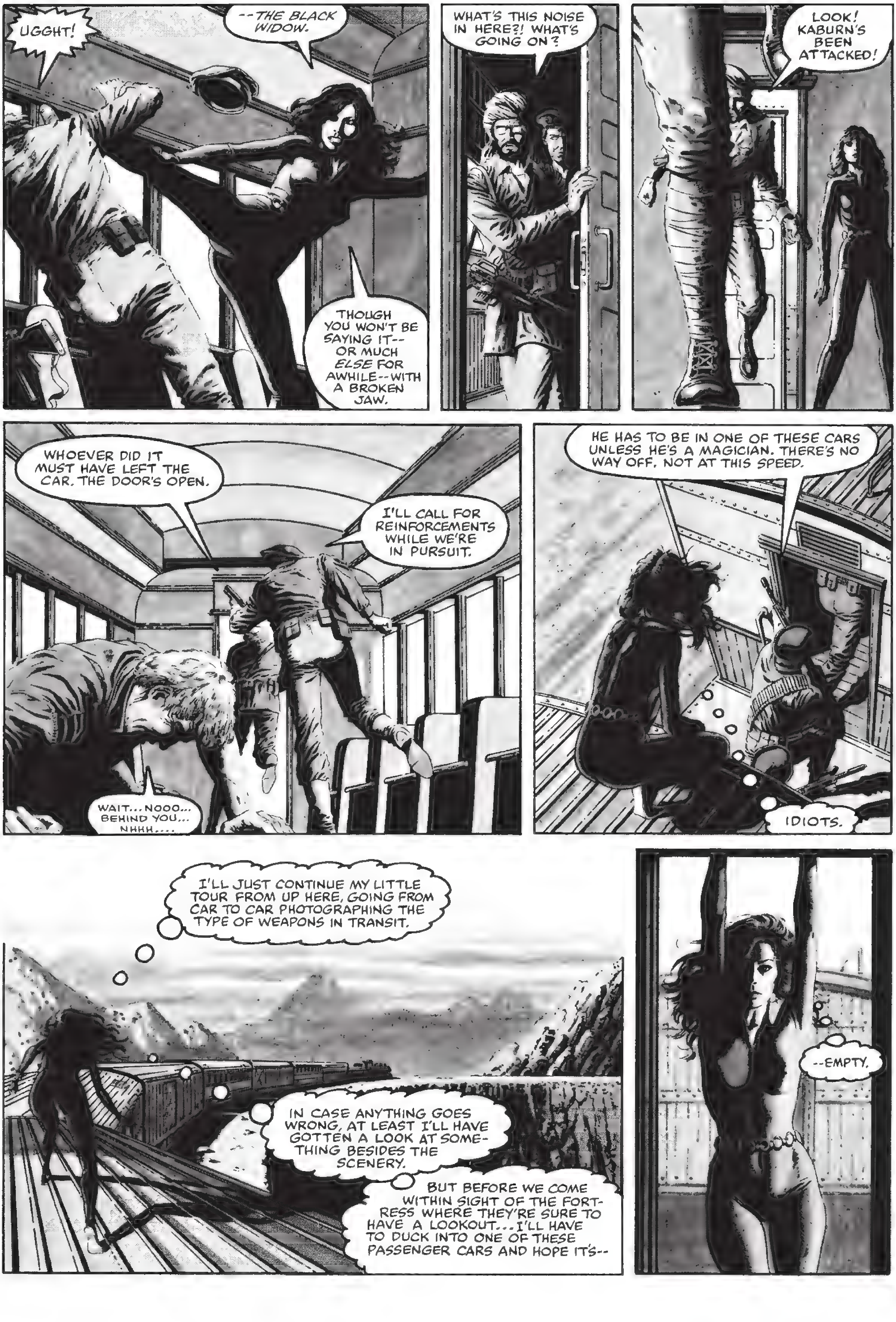
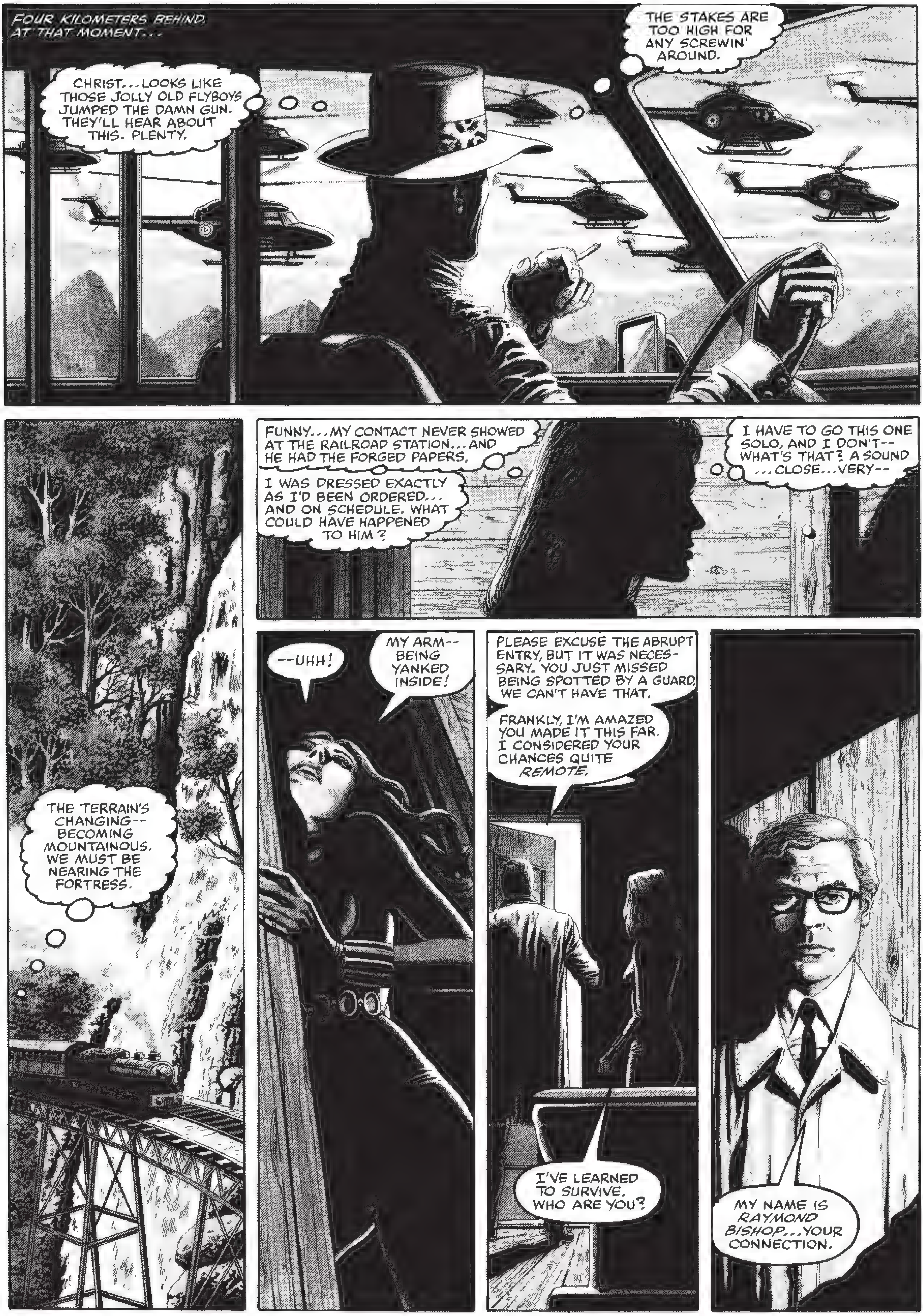
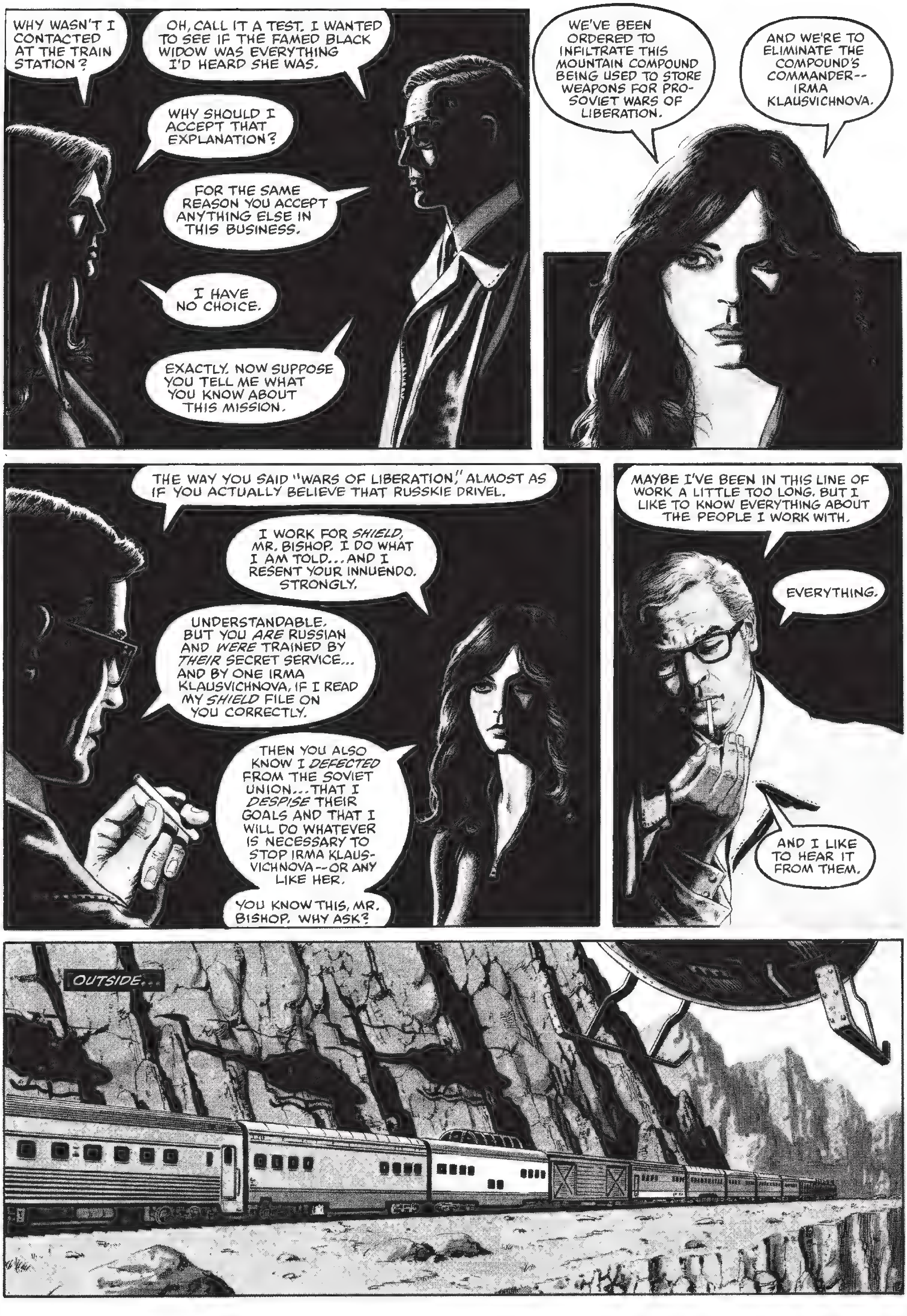

TWELVE HOURS LATER: A REMOTE MOUNTAIN FORTRESS IN THE FOOTHILLS OF AFRICA'S MT. KENYA...
WE HAVE NEWS THAT THE LATEST ARMAMENTS SHIPMENT IS DUE BY RAIL IN LESS THAN SIX HOURS. IT'LL BE ARRIVING FROM NAIROBI.
EXCELLENT. I'LL NOTIFY THE KREMLIN IMMEDIATELY. MAKE ALL THE NECESSARY PREPARATIONS HERE IN THE MEANTIME.
I'LL DO SO AT ONCE. ALL THE UNLOADING FACILITIES WILL BE READY. UNTIL THEN, COMMANDER KLAUSVICHNOVA.
COLONEL.
THIS IS WORKING EXACTLY AS WE HOPED. NO ONE HERE SUSPECTS THAT THE *REAL* IRMA KLAUSVICHNOVA WAS *KILLED* BY PRESCOTT, SO A *SHIELD* LOOK-ALIKE COULD BE SUBSTITUTED IN HER PLACE.
NOW I CAN RELAY THE PERTINENT DATA ON UPCOMING SHIPMENTS DIRECTLY TO HEADQUARTERS, WHILE I'M OVERSEEING THE COMPLEX.
STRANGE... NORMAL PROCEDURE IN SUCH AN OPERATION WOULD BE TO *OVERRUN* THE FORTRESS-- NOT PUSSYFOOT AROUND LIKE THIS.
THE FRONT OFFICE MUST HAVE ITS REASONS, THOUGH. AND MINE IS NOT TO REASON WHY...
...JUST BE IRMA.

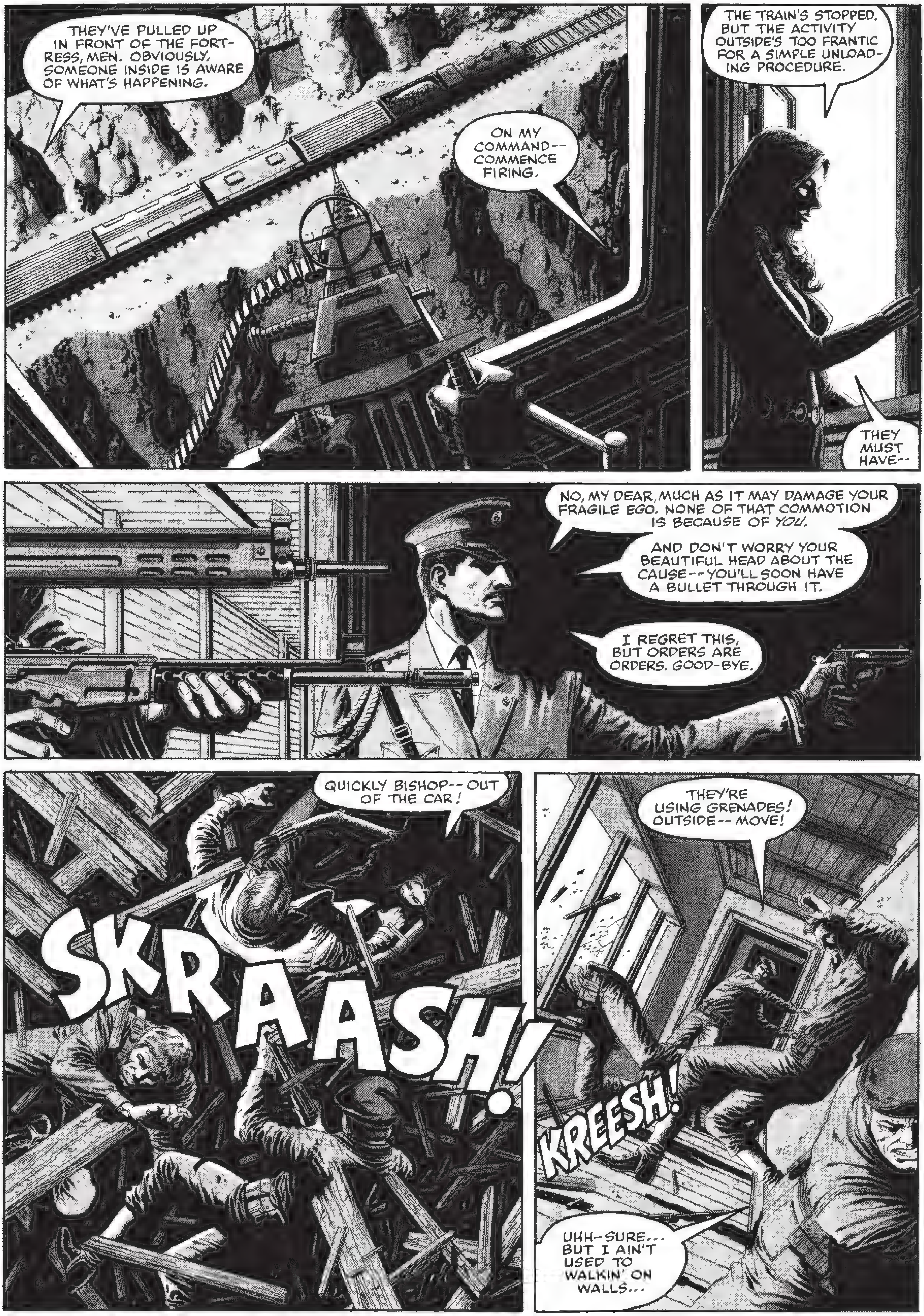

THE FOLLOWING MORNING: A TRAIN STATION IN NAIROBI...
IT IS NOT MY CONCERN IF THEY EXPLODE THE ENTIRE CONTINENT... SO LONG AS I'M PAID.
THEN YOUR LOYALTIES--
STOP TALKING YOU TWO, AND START LOADING BOXES.
JUST LIKE CLOCKWORK...
...THERE HE IS. AND HE'S SPOTTED HER FOR CERTAIN.
NOT A BAD DISGUISE. I FIGURE YOU'LL EVEN GET AWAY WITH IT.
BUT YA CAN'T FOOL ME, BABY. I'D KNOW THOSE EYES ANYWHERE... EVEN BEHIND A MUSLIM MASK.

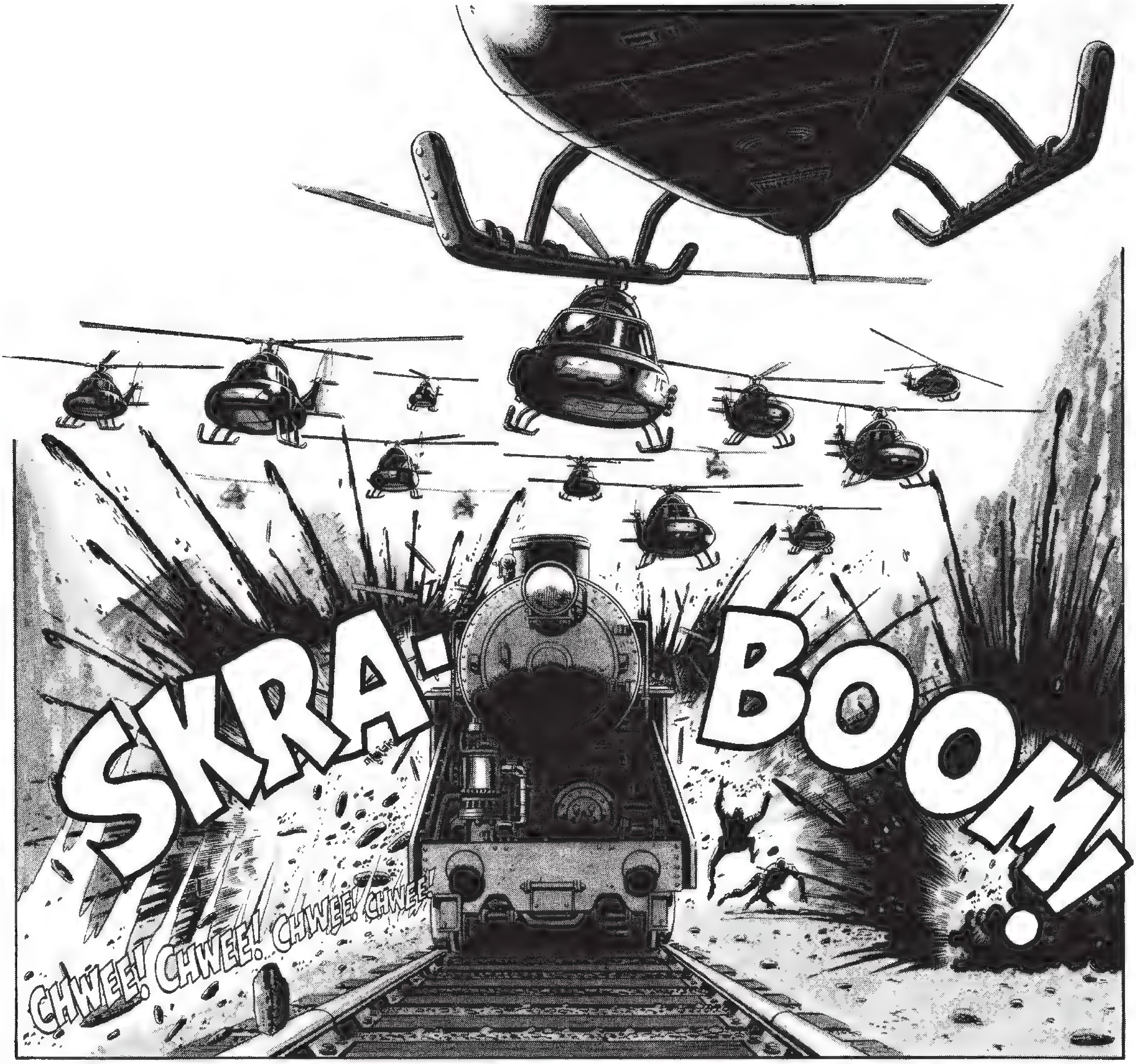

ALL RIGHT. EVERYTHING'S BEEN LOADED. WE'RE READY TO MOVE OUT. ALERT EVERYONE--WE'RE LEAVING.
YES...ALL OF YOUR PAPERS ARE MOST THOROUGH AND IN ORDER. THERE WILL BE NO FURTHER DELAY IN ALLOWING YOU TO BOARD, MR. BISHOP.
THANK YOU. I'LL RIDE IN ONE OF THE PASSENGER CARS IF YOU DON'T MIND. SOMETHING NEAR A WASHROOM...MOTION SICKNESS AND ALL THAT.
CHAANK
SSHHHH SSHHHH SSHHHH
PTSSSSSS
THE SOUTH AFRICAN PLAIN; ONE HOUR LATER...
RADIO AHEAD. CHECKPOINT FOUR HAS BEEN REACHED. ALL GOES WELL.
YOU THERE--*STOP!* THIS CAR IS SUPPOSED TO BE EMPTY. HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?
HALT--OR I'LL *SHOOT!*
WHO ARE YOU?
I AM CALLED--

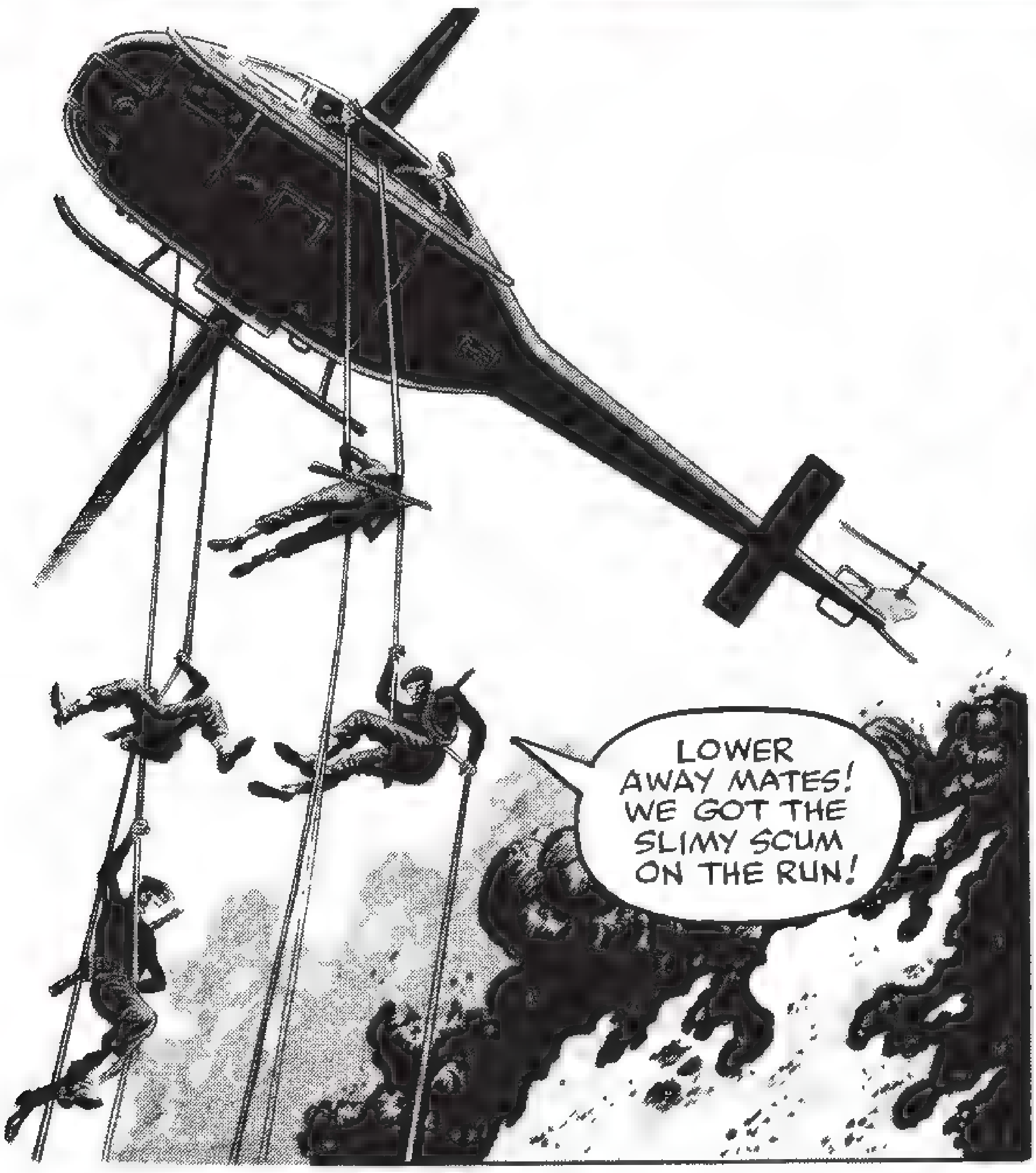

UGGHT!
--THE BLACK WIDOW.
THOUGH YOU WON'T BE SAYING IT-- OR MUCH ELSE FOR AWHILE--WITH A BROKEN JAW.
WHAT'S THIS NOISE IN HERE?! WHAT'S GOING ON?
LOOK! KABURN'S BEEN ATTACKED!
WHOEVER DID IT MUST HAVE LEFT THE CAR. THE DOOR'S OPEN.
I'LL CALL FOR REINFORCEMENTS WHILE WE'RE IN PURSUIT.
WAIT... NOOO... BEHIND YOU... NHHH....
HE HAS TO BE IN ONE OF THESE CARS UNLESS HE'S A MAGICIAN. THERE'S NO WAY OFF. NOT AT THIS SPEED.
IDIOTS.
I'LL JUST CONTINUE MY LITTLE TOUR FROM UP HERE, GOING FROM CAR TO CAR PHOTOGRAPHING THE TYPE OF WEAPONS IN TRANSIT.
IN CASE ANYTHING GOES WRONG, AT LEAST I'LL HAVE GOTTEN A LOOK AT SOMETHING BESIDES THE SCENERY.
BUT BEFORE WE COME WITHIN SIGHT OF THE FORTRESS WHERE THEY'RE SURE TO HAVE A LOOKOUT... I'LL HAVE TO DUCK INTO ONE OF THESE PASSENGER CARS AND HOPE IT'S--
--EMPTY.

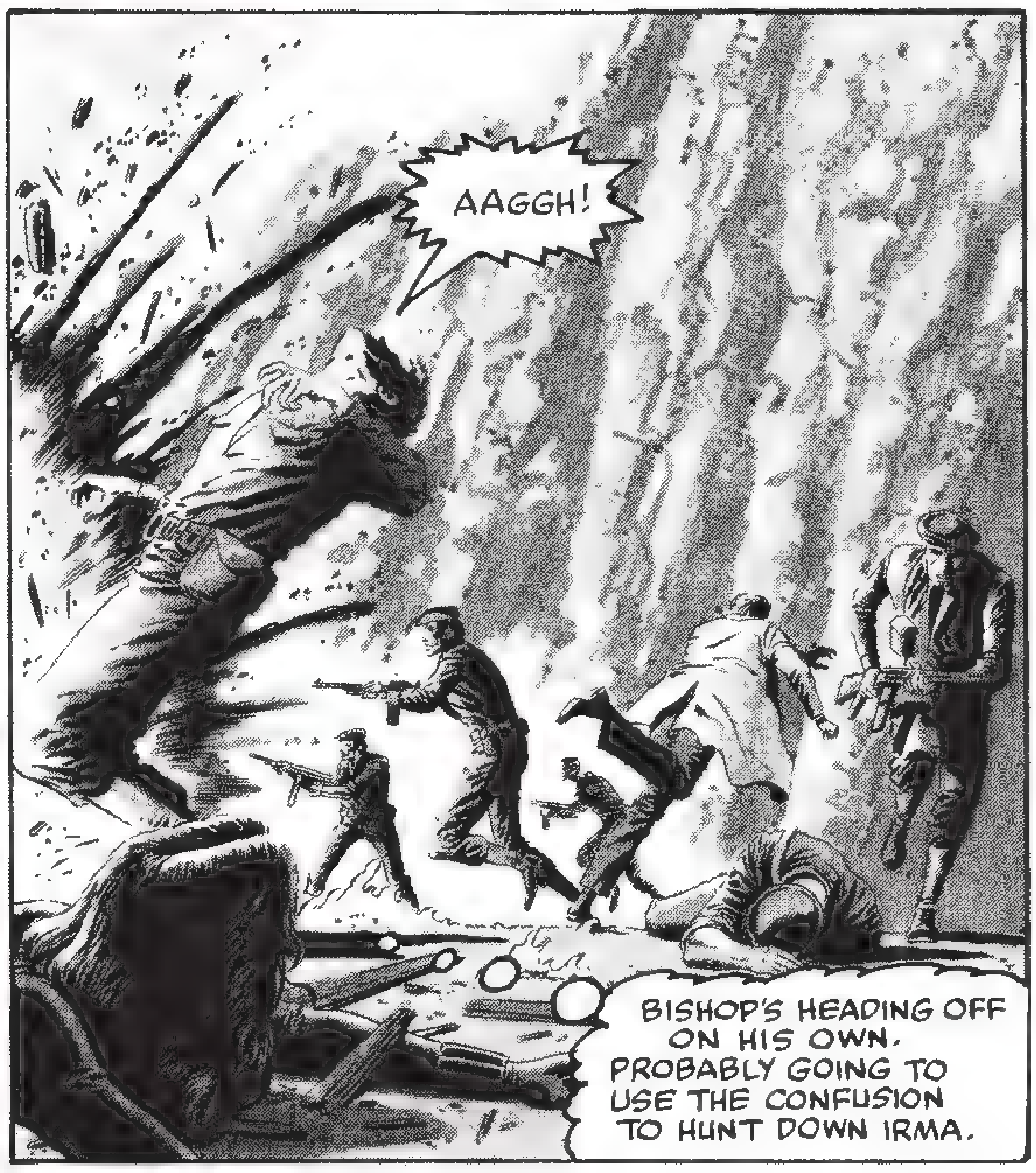

FOUR KILOMETERS BEHIND. AT THAT MOMENT...
CHRIST... LOOKS LIKE THOSE JOLLY OLD FLYBOYS JUMPED THE DAMN GUN. THEY'LL HEAR ABOUT THIS. PLENTY.
THE STAKES ARE TOO HIGH FOR ANY SCREWIN' AROUND.
THE TERRAIN'S CHANGING-- BECOMING MOUNTAINOUS. WE MUST BE NEARING THE FORTRESS.
FUNNY... MY CONTACT NEVER SHOWED AT THE RAILROAD STATION... AND HE HAD THE FORGED PAPERS.
I WAS DRESSED EXACTLY AS I'D BEEN ORDERED... AND ON SCHEDULE. WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO HIM?
I HAVE TO GO THIS ONE SOLO, AND I DON'T-- WHAT'S THAT? A SOUND ...CLOSE...VERY--
--UHH!
MY ARM-- BEING YANKED INSIDE!
PLEASE EXCUSE THE ABRUPT ENTRY, BUT IT WAS NECESSARY. YOU JUST MISSED BEING SPOTTED BY A GUARD. WE CAN'T HAVE THAT.
FRANKLY, I'M AMAZED YOU MADE IT THIS FAR. I CONSIDERED YOUR CHANCES QUITE *REMOTE*.
I'VE LEARNED TO SURVIVE. WHO ARE YOU?
MY NAME IS *RAYMOND BISHOP*... YOUR CONNECTION.

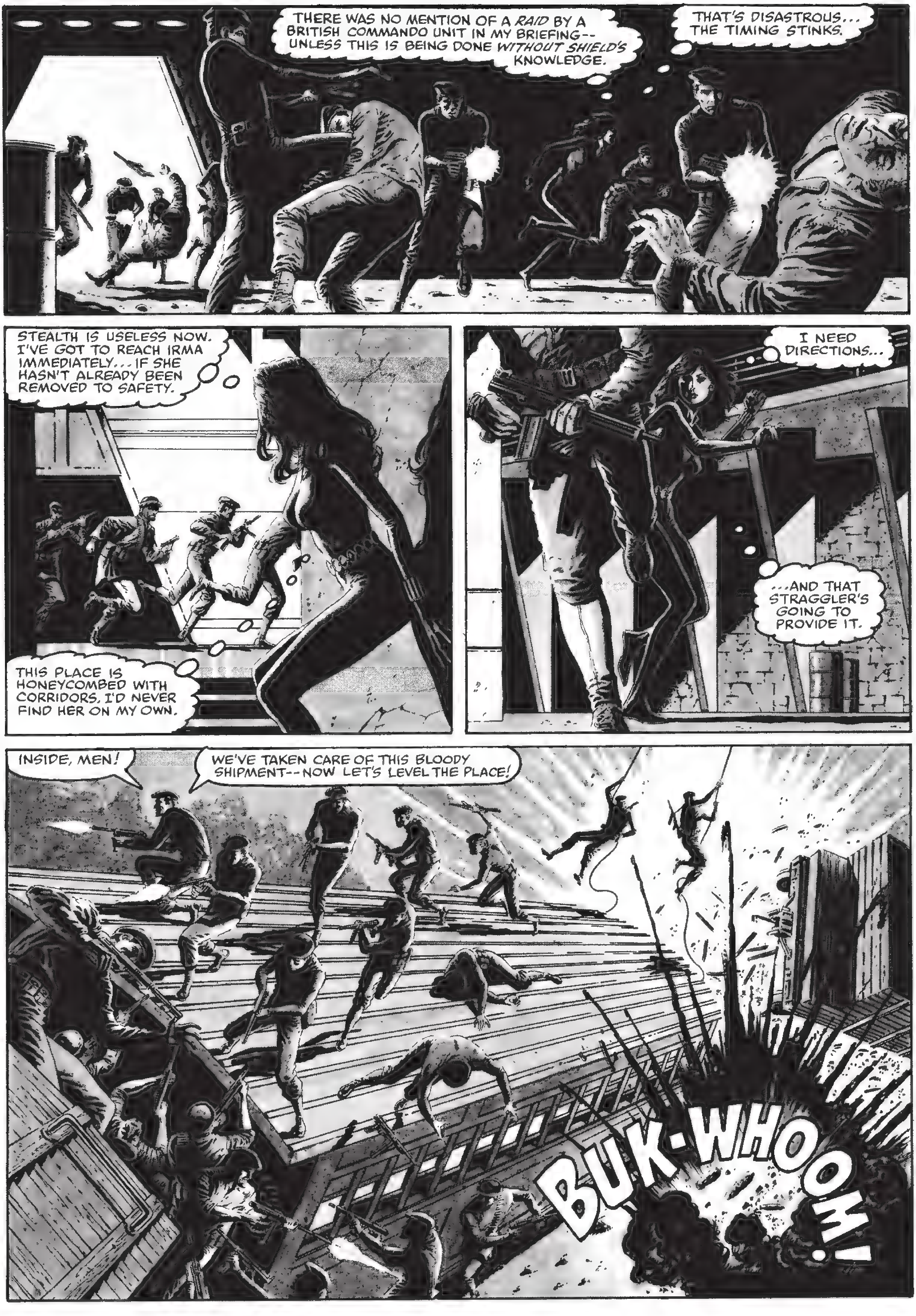

WHY WASN'T I CONTACTED AT THE TRAIN STATION?
OH, CALL IT A TEST. I WANTED TO SEE IF THE FAMED BLACK WIDOW WAS EVERYTHING I'D HEARD SHE WAS.
WHY SHOULD I ACCEPT THAT EXPLANATION?
FOR THE SAME REASON YOU ACCEPT ANYTHING ELSE IN THIS BUSINESS.
I HAVE NO CHOICE.
EXACTLY. NOW SUPPOSE YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS MISSION.
WE'VE BEEN ORDERED TO INFILTRATE THIS MOUNTAIN COMPOUND BEING USED TO STORE WEAPONS FOR PRO-SOVIET WARS OF LIBERATION.
AND WE'RE TO ELIMINATE THE COMPOUND'S COMMANDER-- IRMA KLAUSVICHNOVA.
THE WAY YOU SAID "WARS OF LIBERATION," ALMOST AS IF YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE THAT RUSSKIE DRIVEL.
I WORK FOR *SHIELD*, MR. BISHOP. I DO WHAT I AM TOLD... AND I RESENT YOUR INNUENDO. STRONGLY.
UNDERSTANDABLE. BUT YOU *ARE* RUSSIAN AND *WERE* TRAINED BY *THEIR* SECRET SERVICE... AND BY ONE IRMA KLAUSVICHNOVA, IF I READ MY *SHIELD* FILE ON YOU CORRECTLY.
THEN YOU ALSO KNOW I *DEFECTED* FROM THE SOVIET UNION... THAT I *DESPISE* THEIR GOALS AND THAT I WILL DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO STOP IRMA KLAUSVICHNOVA--OR ANY LIKE HER.
YOU KNOW THIS, MR. BISHOP. WHY ASK?
MAYBE I'VE BEEN IN THIS LINE OF WORK A LITTLE TOO LONG. BUT I LIKE TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THE PEOPLE I WORK WITH.
EVERYTHING.
AND I LIKE TO HEAR IT FROM THEM.
OUTSIDE...

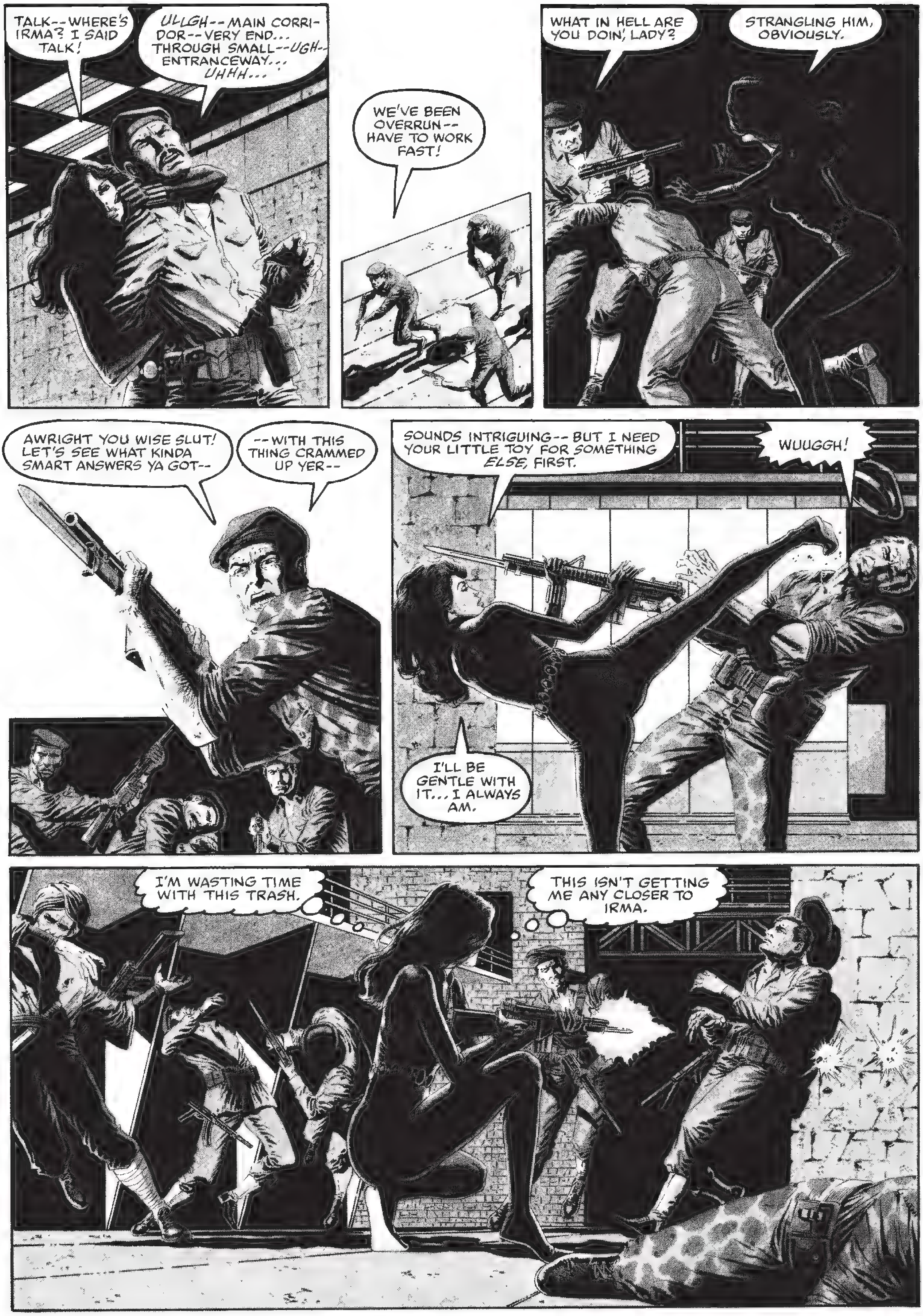

THEY'VE PULLED UP IN FRONT OF THE FORTRESS, MEN. OBVIOUSLY, SOMEONE INSIDE IS AWARE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING.
ON MY COMMAND-- COMMENCE FIRING.
THE TRAIN'S STOPPED, BUT THE ACTIVITY OUTSIDE'S TOO FRANTIC FOR A SIMPLE UNLOADING PROCEDURE.
THEY MUST HAVE--
NO, MY DEAR, MUCH AS IT MAY DAMAGE YOUR FRAGILE EGO, NONE OF THAT COMMOTION IS BECAUSE OF *YOU*.
AND DON'T WORRY YOUR BEAUTIFUL HEAD ABOUT THE CAUSE--YOU'LL SOON HAVE A BULLET THROUGH IT.
I REGRET THIS, BUT ORDERS ARE ORDERS. GOOD-BYE.
QUICKLY BISHOP-- OUT OF THE CAR!
SKRAASH!
THEY'RE USING GRENADES! OUTSIDE-- MOVE!
KREESH!
UHH-SURE... BUT I AIN'T USED TO WALKIN' ON WALLS...

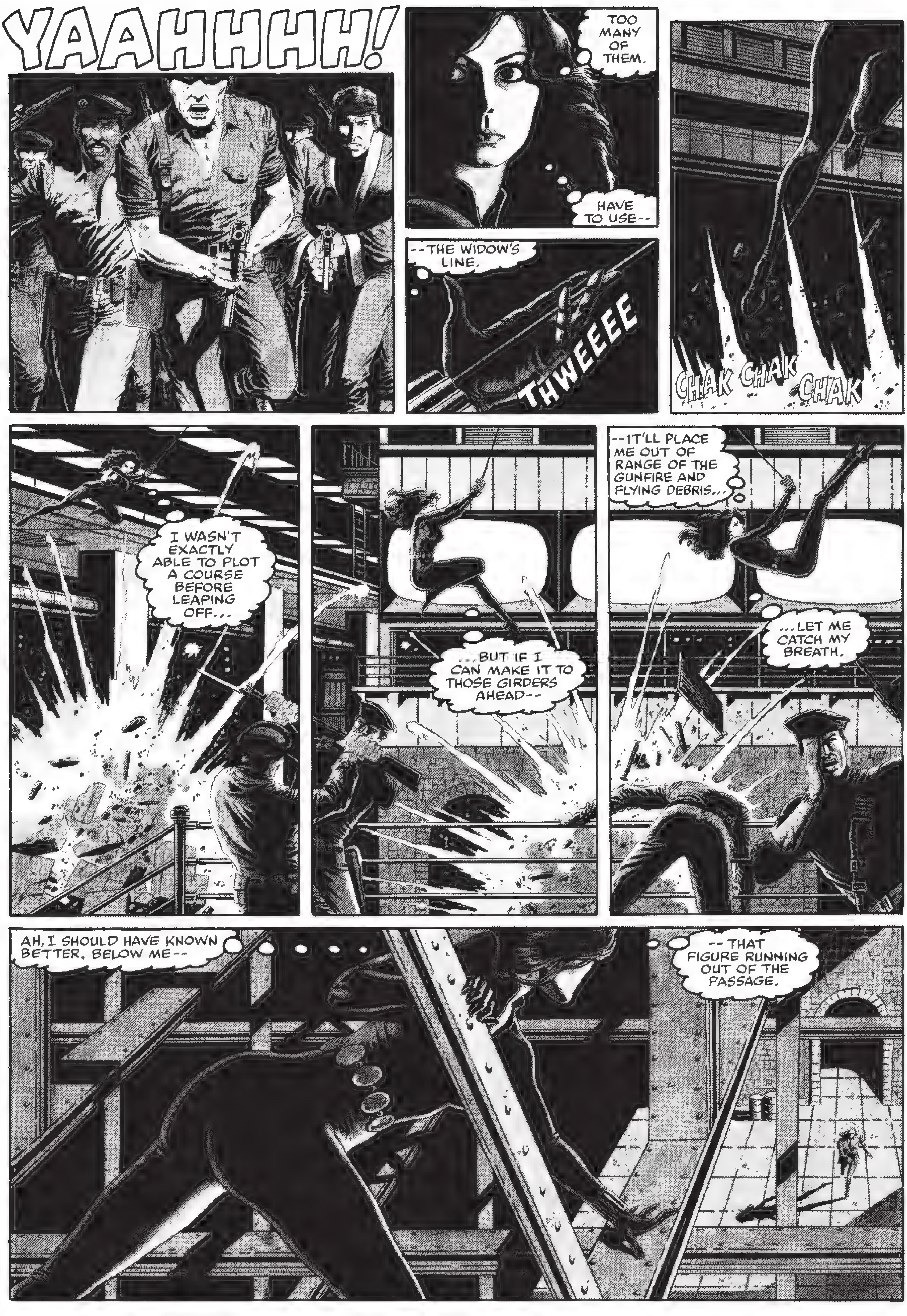

SKRA-BOOM!
CHWEE! CHWEE! CHWEE! CHWEE!

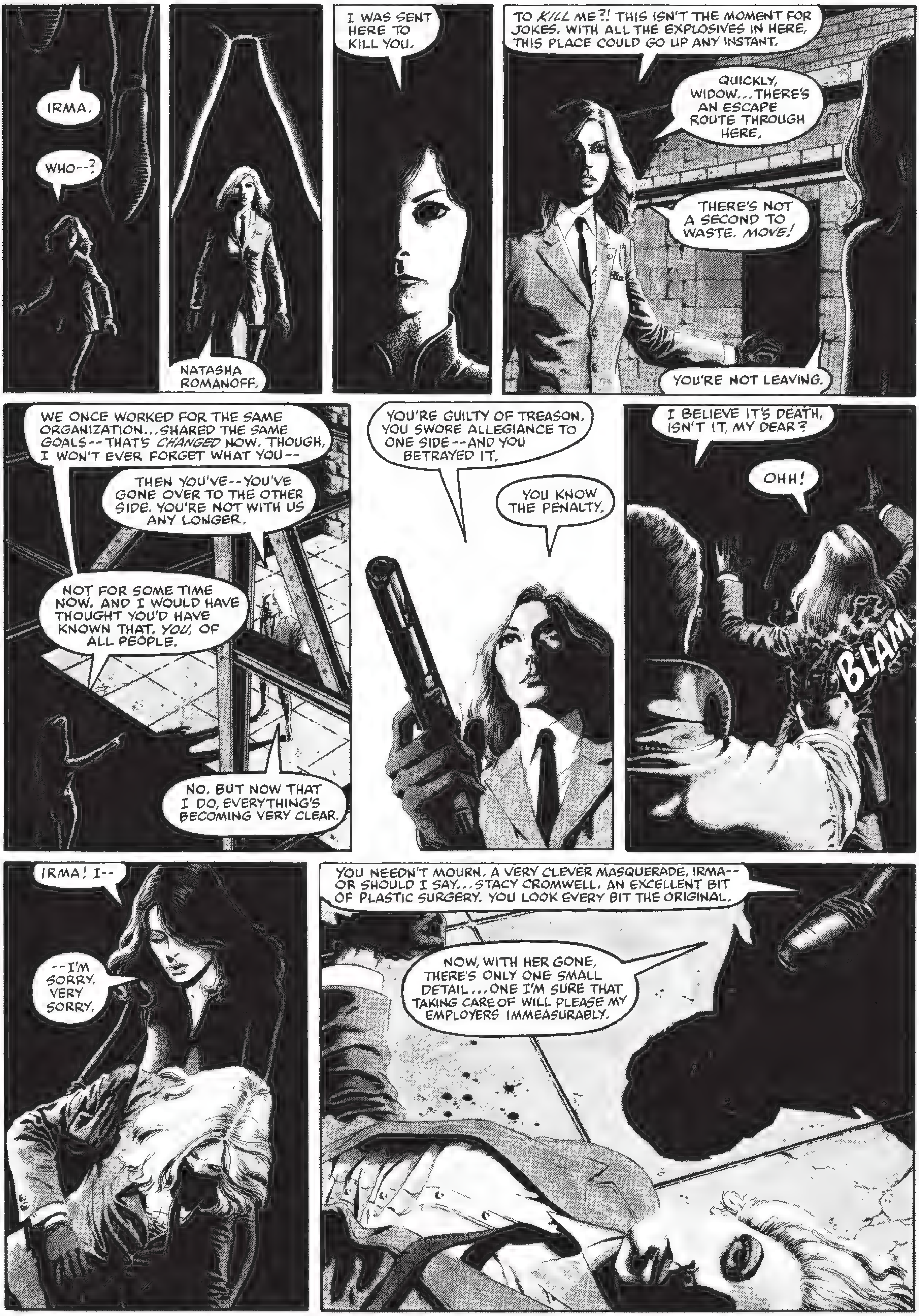

LOWER AWAY MATES! WE GOT THE SLIMY SCUM ON THE RUN!

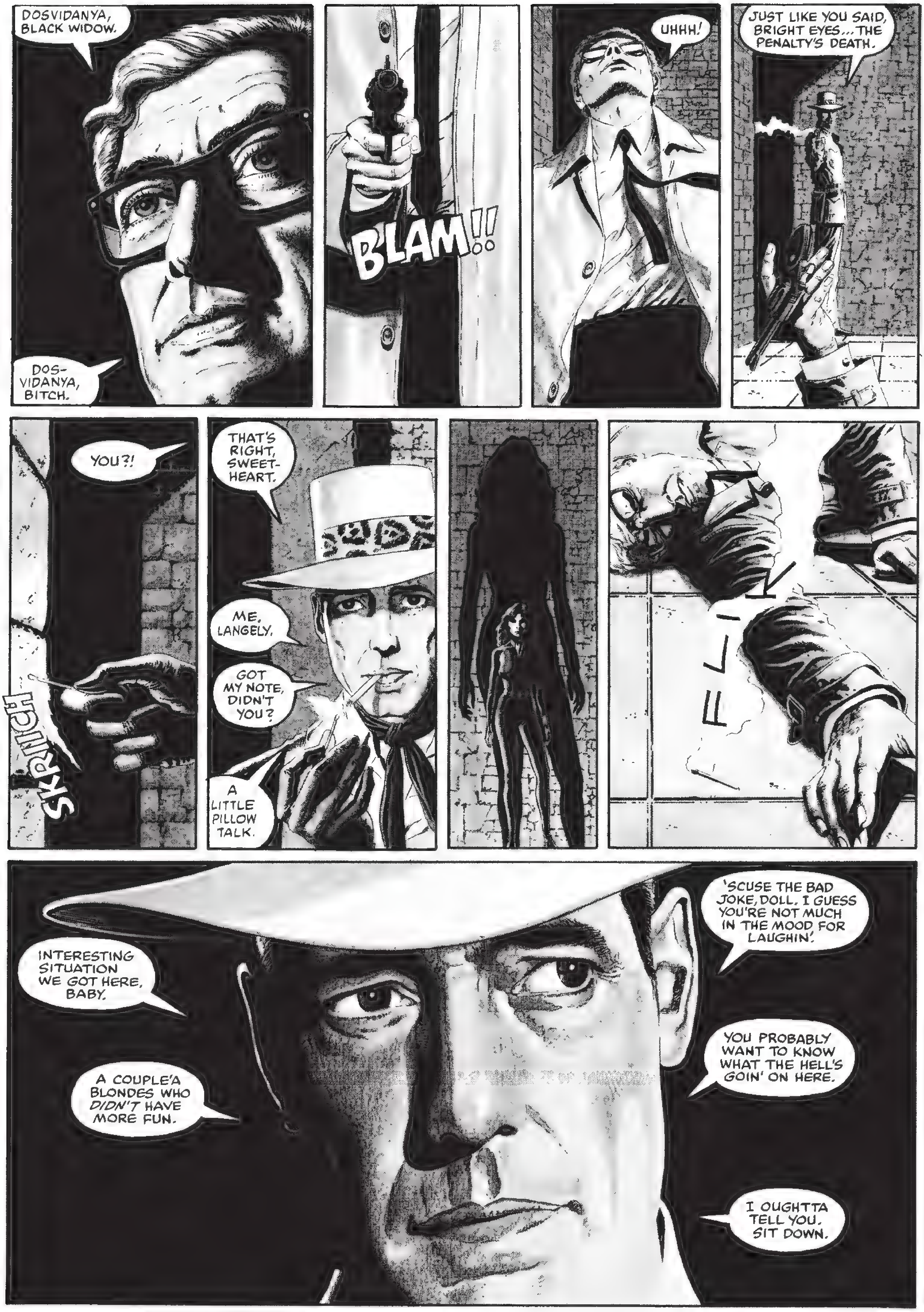

AAGGH!
BISHOP'S HEADING OFF ON HIS OWN. PROBABLY GOING TO USE THE CONFUSION TO HUNT DOWN IRMA.

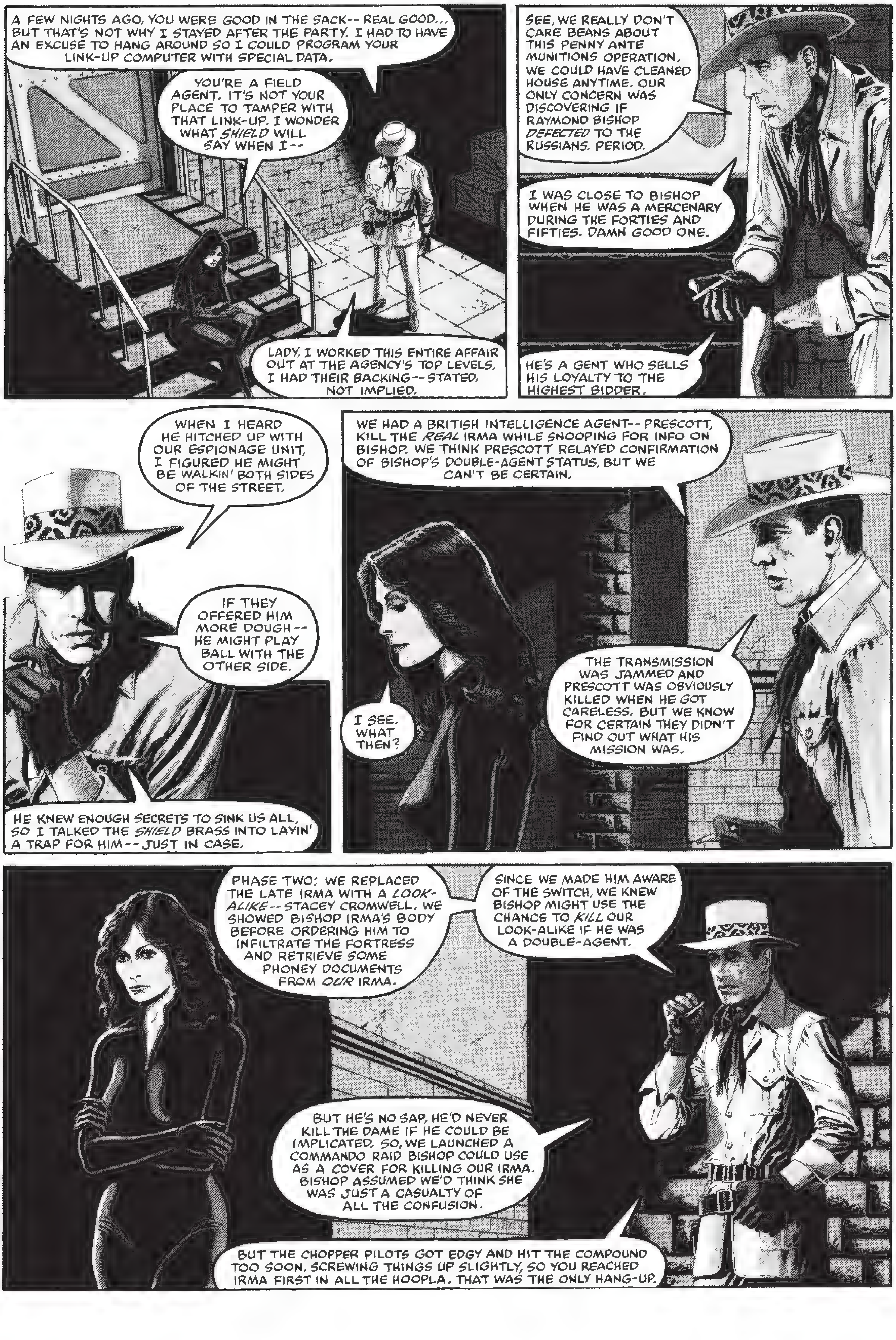

THERE WAS NO MENTION OF A *RAID* BY A BRITISH COMMANDO UNIT IN MY BRIEFING-- UNLESS THIS IS BEING DONE *WITHOUT SHIELD'S* KNOWLEDGE.
THAT'S DISASTROUS... THE TIMING STINKS.
STEALTH IS USELESS NOW. I'VE GOT TO REACH IRMA IMMEDIATELY... IF SHE HASN'T ALREADY BEEN REMOVED TO SAFETY.
THIS PLACE IS HONEYCOMBED WITH CORRIDORS. I'D NEVER FIND HER ON MY OWN.
I NEED DIRECTIONS...
...AND THAT STRAGGLER'S GOING TO PROVIDE IT.
INSIDE, MEN!
WE'VE TAKEN CARE OF THIS BLOODY SHIPMENT--NOW LET'S LEVEL THE PLACE!
BUK-WHOOM!

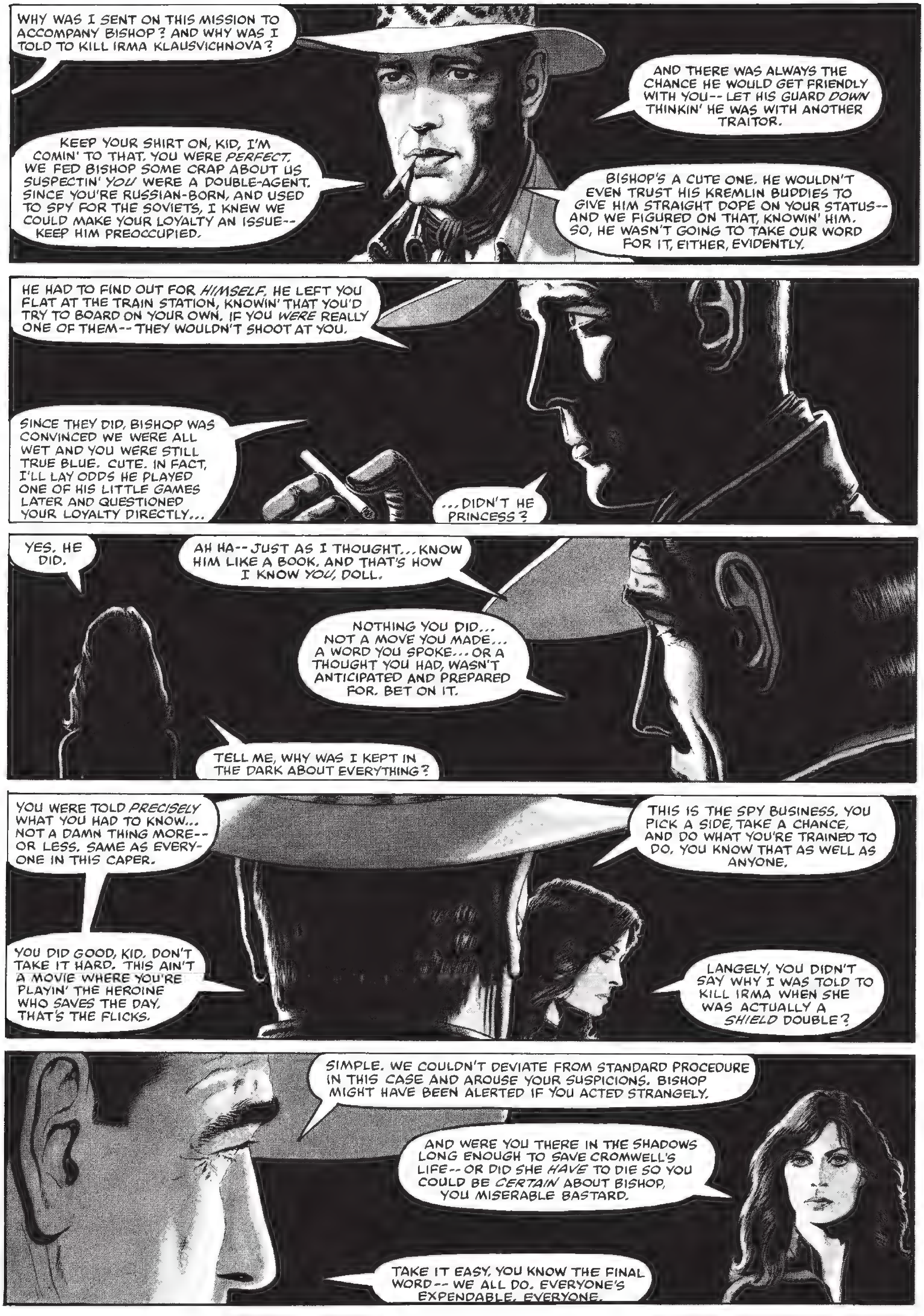

TALK--WHERE'S IRMA? I SAID TALK!
ULLGH--MAIN CORRIDOR--VERY END... THROUGH SMALL--UGH--ENTRANCEWAY... UHHH...
WE'VE BEEN OVERRUN--HAVE TO WORK FAST!
WHAT IN HELL ARE YOU DOIN', LADY?
STRANGLING HIM, OBVIOUSLY.
AWRIGHT YOU WISE SLUT! LET'S SEE WHAT KINDA SMART ANSWERS YA GOT--
--WITH THIS THING CRAMMED UP YER--
SOUNDS INTRIGUING--BUT I NEED YOUR LITTLE TOY FOR SOMETHING ELSE, FIRST.
WUUGGH!
I'LL BE GENTLE WITH IT... I ALWAYS AM.
I'M WASTING TIME WITH THIS TRASH.
THIS ISN'T GETTING ME ANY CLOSER TO IRMA.

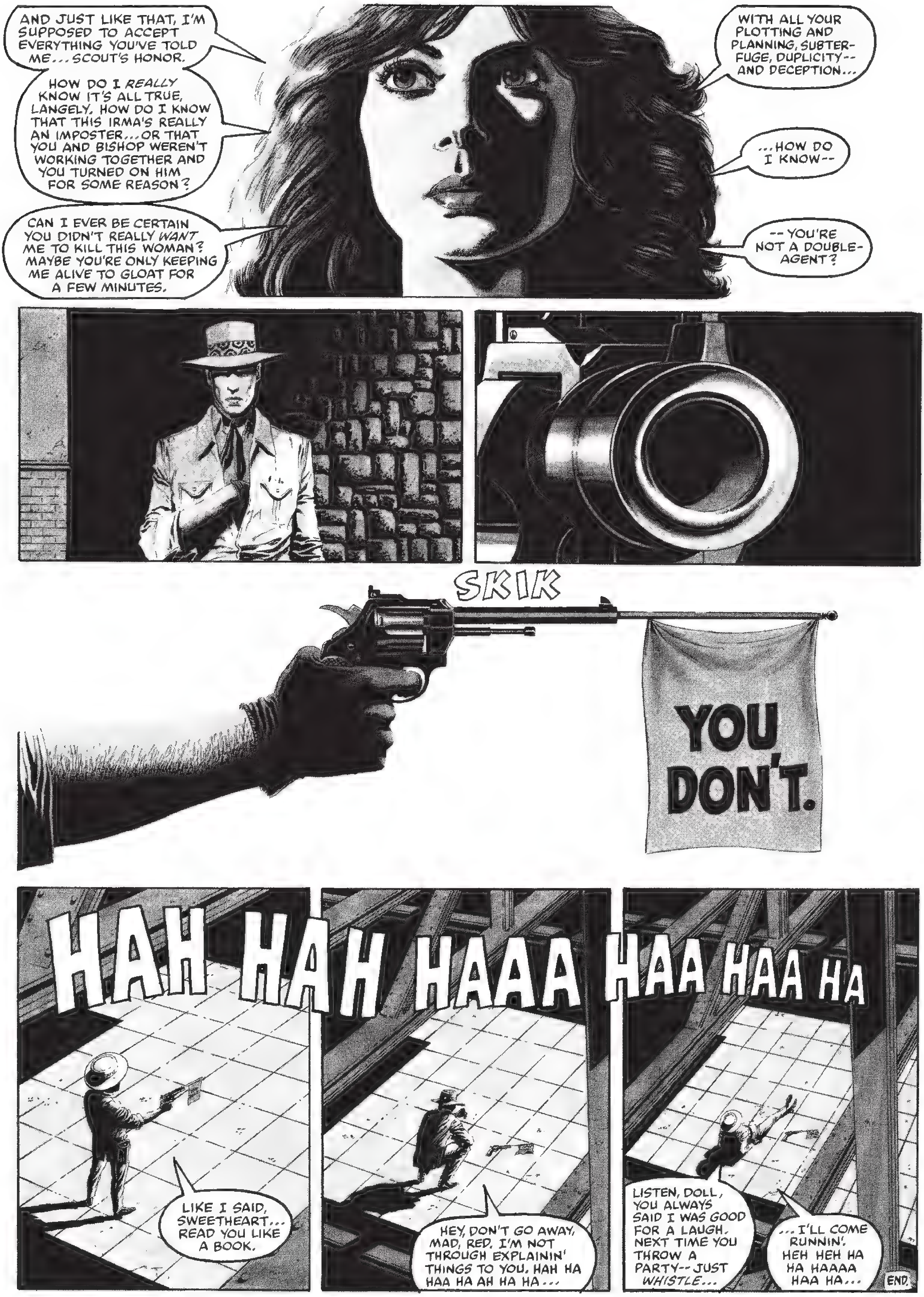

YAAHHHH!
TOO MANY OF THEM.
HAVE TO USE--
--THE WIDOW'S LINE.
THWEEEE
CHAK CHAK CHAK
I WASN'T EXACTLY ABLE TO PLOT A COURSE BEFORE LEAPING OFF...
...BUT IF I CAN MAKE IT TO THOSE GIRDERS AHEAD--
--IT'LL PLACE ME OUT OF RANGE OF THE GUNFIRE AND FLYING DEBRIS...
...LET ME CATCH MY BREATH.
AH, I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER. BELOW ME--
--THAT FIGURE RUNNING OUT OF THE PASSAGE.


IRMA.
WHO--?
NATASHA ROMANOFF.
I WAS SENT HERE TO KILL YOU.
TO *KILL* ME?! THIS ISN'T THE MOMENT FOR JOKES. WITH ALL THE EXPLOSIVES IN HERE, THIS PLACE COULD GO UP ANY INSTANT.
QUICKLY, WIDOW... THERE'S AN ESCAPE ROUTE THROUGH HERE.
THERE'S NOT A SECOND TO WASTE. *MOVE!*
YOU'RE NOT LEAVING.
WE ONCE WORKED FOR THE SAME ORGANIZATION... SHARED THE SAME *GOALS*-- THAT'S *CHANGED* NOW. THOUGH, I WON'T EVER FORGET WHAT YOU--
THEN YOU'VE-- YOU'VE GONE OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE. YOU'RE NOT WITH US ANY LONGER.
NOT FOR SOME TIME NOW. AND I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT YOU'D HAVE KNOWN THAT. *YOU*, OF ALL PEOPLE.
NO. BUT NOW THAT I DO, EVERYTHING'S BECOMING VERY CLEAR.
YOU'RE GUILTY OF TREASON. YOU SWORE ALLEGIANCE TO ONE SIDE-- AND YOU BETRAYED IT.
YOU KNOW THE PENALTY.
I BELIEVE IT'S DEATH, ISN'T IT, MY DEAR?
OHH!
BLAM
IRMA! I--
--I'M SORRY. VERY SORRY.
YOU NEEDN'T MOURN. A VERY CLEVER MASQUERADE, IRMA-- OR SHOULD I SAY... STACY CROMWELL. AN EXCELLENT BIT OF PLASTIC SURGERY. YOU LOOK EVERY BIT THE ORIGINAL.
NOW, WITH HER GONE, THERE'S ONLY ONE SMALL DETAIL... ONE I'M SURE THAT TAKING CARE OF WILL PLEASE MY EMPLOYERS IMMEASURABLY.


DOSVIDANYA, BLACK WIDOW.
DOS-VIDANYA, BITCH.
B'LAM!!
UHHH!
JUST LIKE YOU SAID, BRIGHT EYES... THE PENALTY'S DEATH.
YOU?!
SKRITCH
THAT'S RIGHT, SWEET-HEART.
ME. LANGELY.
GOT MY NOTE, DIDN'T YOU?
A LITTLE PILLOW TALK.
FLIK
INTERESTING SITUATION WE GOT HERE, BABY.
A COUPLE'A BLONDES WHO *DIDN'T* HAVE MORE FUN.
'SCUSE THE BAD JOKE, DOLL. I GUESS YOU'RE NOT MUCH IN THE MOOD FOR LAUGHIN'.
YOU PROBABLY WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE HELL'S GOIN' ON HERE.
I OUGHTTA TELL YOU. SIT DOWN.


A FEW NIGHTS AGO, YOU WERE GOOD IN THE SACK-- REAL GOOD... BUT THAT'S NOT WHY I STAYED AFTER THE PARTY. I HAD TO HAVE AN EXCUSE TO HANG AROUND SO I COULD PROGRAM YOUR LINK-UP COMPUTER WITH SPECIAL DATA.
YOU'RE A FIELD AGENT. IT'S NOT YOUR PLACE TO TAMPER WITH THAT LINK-UP. I WONDER WHAT *SHIELD* WILL SAY WHEN I--
LADY, I WORKED THIS ENTIRE AFFAIR OUT AT THE AGENCY'S TOP LEVELS. I HAD THEIR BACKING-- STATED, NOT IMPLIED.
SEE, WE REALLY DON'T CARE BEANS ABOUT THIS PENNY ANTE MUNITIONS OPERATION. WE COULD HAVE CLEANED HOUSE ANYTIME. OUR ONLY CONCERN WAS DISCOVERING IF RAYMOND BISHOP *DEFECTED* TO THE RUSSIANS. PERIOD.
I WAS CLOSE TO BISHOP WHEN HE WAS A MERCENARY DURING THE FORTIES AND FIFTIES. DAMN GOOD ONE.
HE'S A GENT WHO SELLS HIS LOYALTY TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER.
WHEN I HEARD HE HITCHED UP WITH OUR ESPIONAGE UNIT, I FIGURED HE MIGHT BE WALKIN' BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET.
IF THEY OFFERED HIM MORE DOUGH-- HE MIGHT PLAY BALL WITH THE OTHER SIDE.
HE KNEW ENOUGH SECRETS TO SINK US ALL, SO I TALKED THE *SHIELD* BRASS INTO LAYIN' A TRAP FOR HIM-- JUST IN CASE.
WE HAD A BRITISH INTELLIGENCE AGENT-- PRESCOTT, KILL THE *REAL* IRMA WHILE SNOOPING FOR INFO ON BISHOP. WE THINK PRESCOTT RELAYED CONFIRMATION OF BISHOP'S DOUBLE-AGENT STATUS, BUT WE CAN'T BE CERTAIN.
I SEE. WHAT THEN?
THE TRANSMISSION WAS JAMMED AND PRESCOTT WAS OBVIOUSLY KILLED WHEN HE GOT CARELESS. BUT WE KNOW FOR CERTAIN THEY DIDN'T FIND OUT WHAT HIS MISSION WAS.
PHASE TWO: WE REPLACED THE LATE IRMA WITH A *LOOK-ALIKE*-- STACEY CROMWELL. WE SHOWED BISHOP IRMA'S BODY BEFORE ORDERING HIM TO INFILTRATE THE FORTRESS AND RETRIEVE *SOME* PHONEY DOCUMENTS FROM *OUR* IRMA.
SINCE WE MADE HIM AWARE OF THE SWITCH, WE KNEW BISHOP MIGHT USE THE CHANCE TO *KILL* OUR LOOK-ALIKE IF HE WAS A DOUBLE-AGENT.
BUT HE'S NO SAP. HE'D NEVER KILL THE DAME IF HE COULD BE IMPLICATED. SO, WE LAUNCHED A COMMANDO RAID BISHOP COULD USE AS A COVER FOR KILLING OUR IRMA. BISHOP ASSUMED WE'D THINK SHE WAS JUST A CASUALTY OF ALL THE CONFUSION.
BUT THE CHOPPER PILOTS GOT EDGY AND HIT THE COMPOUND TOO SOON, SCREWING THINGS UP SLIGHTLY, SO YOU REACHED IRMA FIRST IN ALL THE HOOPLA. THAT WAS THE ONLY HANG-UP.


WHY WAS I SENT ON THIS MISSION TO ACCOMPANY BISHOP? AND WHY WAS I TOLD TO KILL IRMA KLAUSVICHNOVA?
KEEP YOUR SHIRT ON, KID, I'M COMIN' TO THAT. YOU WERE *PERFECT.* WE FED BISHOP SOME CRAP ABOUT US SUSPECTIN' *YOU* WERE A DOUBLE-AGENT. SINCE YOU'RE RUSSIAN-BORN, AND USED TO SPY FOR THE SOVIETS, I KNEW WE COULD MAKE YOUR LOYALTY AN ISSUE-- KEEP HIM PREOCCUPIED.
AND THERE WAS ALWAYS THE CHANCE HE WOULD GET FRIENDLY WITH YOU-- LET HIS GUARD *DOWN* THINKIN' HE WAS WITH ANOTHER TRAITOR.
BISHOP'S A CUTE ONE. HE WOULDN'T EVEN TRUST HIS KREMLIN BUDDIES TO GIVE HIM STRAIGHT DOPE ON YOUR STATUS-- AND WE FIGURED ON THAT, KNOWIN' HIM. SO, HE WASN'T GOING TO TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT, EITHER, EVIDENTLY.
HE HAD TO FIND OUT FOR *HIMSELF.* HE LEFT YOU FLAT AT THE TRAIN STATION, KNOWIN' THAT YOU'D TRY TO BOARD ON YOUR OWN. IF YOU *WERE* REALLY ONE OF THEM-- THEY WOULDN'T SHOOT AT YOU.
SINCE THEY DID, BISHOP WAS CONVINCED WE WERE ALL WET AND YOU WERE STILL TRUE BLUE. CUTE. IN FACT, I'LL LAY ODDS HE PLAYED ONE OF HIS LITTLE GAMES LATER AND QUESTIONED YOUR LOYALTY DIRECTLY...
...DIDN'T HE PRINCESS?
YES. HE DID.
AH HA-- JUST AS I THOUGHT... KNOW HIM LIKE A BOOK. AND THAT'S HOW I KNOW *YOU,* DOLL.
NOTHING YOU DID... NOT A MOVE YOU MADE... A WORD YOU SPOKE... OR A THOUGHT YOU HAD, WASN'T ANTICIPATED AND PREPARED FOR. BET ON IT.
TELL ME, WHY WAS I KEPT IN THE DARK ABOUT EVERYTHING?
YOU WERE TOLD *PRECISELY* WHAT YOU HAD TO KNOW... NOT A DAMN THING MORE-- OR LESS. SAME AS EVERYONE IN THIS CAPER.
THIS IS THE SPY BUSINESS. YOU PICK A SIDE, TAKE A CHANCE, AND DO WHAT YOU'RE TRAINED TO DO. YOU KNOW THAT AS WELL AS ANYONE.
YOU DID GOOD, KID. DON'T TAKE IT HARD. THIS AIN'T A MOVIE WHERE YOU'RE PLAYIN' THE HEROINE WHO *SAVES* THE DAY. THAT'S THE FLICKS.
LANGELY, YOU DIDN'T SAY WHY I WAS TOLD TO KILL IRMA WHEN SHE WAS ACTUALLY A *SHIELD* DOUBLE?
SIMPLE. WE COULDN'T DEVIATE FROM STANDARD PROCEDURE IN THIS CASE AND AROUSE YOUR SUSPICIONS. BISHOP MIGHT HAVE BEEN ALERTED IF YOU ACTED STRANGELY.
AND WERE YOU THERE IN THE SHADOWS LONG ENOUGH TO *SAVE* CROMWELL'S LIFE-- OR DID SHE *HAVE* TO DIE SO YOU COULD BE *CERTAIN* ABOUT BISHOP, YOU MISERABLE BASTARD.
TAKE IT EASY. YOU KNOW THE FINAL WORD-- WE ALL DO. EVERYONE'S EXPENDABLE. EVERYONE.


AND JUST LIKE THAT, I'M SUPPOSED TO ACCEPT EVERYTHING YOU'VE TOLD ME... SCOUT'S HONOR.
HOW DO I *REALLY* KNOW IT'S ALL TRUE, LANGELY. HOW DO I KNOW THAT THIS IRMA'S REALLY AN IMPOSTER... OR THAT YOU AND BISHOP WEREN'T WORKING TOGETHER AND YOU TURNED ON HIM FOR SOME REASON?
CAN I EVER BE CERTAIN YOU DIDN'T REALLY *WANT* ME TO KILL THIS WOMAN? MAYBE YOU'RE ONLY KEEPING ME ALIVE TO GLOAT FOR A FEW MINUTES.
WITH ALL YOUR PLOTTING AND PLANNING, SUBTERFUGE, DUPLICITY-- AND DECEPTION...
...HOW DO I KNOW--
--YOU'RE NOT A DOUBLE-AGENT?
SKIK
YOU DON'T.
HAH HAH HAAA HAA HAA HA
LIKE I SAID, SWEETHEART... READ YOU LIKE A BOOK.
HEY, DON'T GO AWAY, MAD, RED. I'M NOT THROUGH EXPLAININ' THINGS TO YOU. HAH HA HAA HA AH HA HA...
LISTEN, DOLL, YOU ALWAYS SAID I WAS GOOD FOR A LAUGH. NEXT TIME YOU THROW A PARTY-- JUST *WHISTLE*...
...I'LL COME RUNNIN'. HEH HEH HA HA HAAAA HAA HA...
END.

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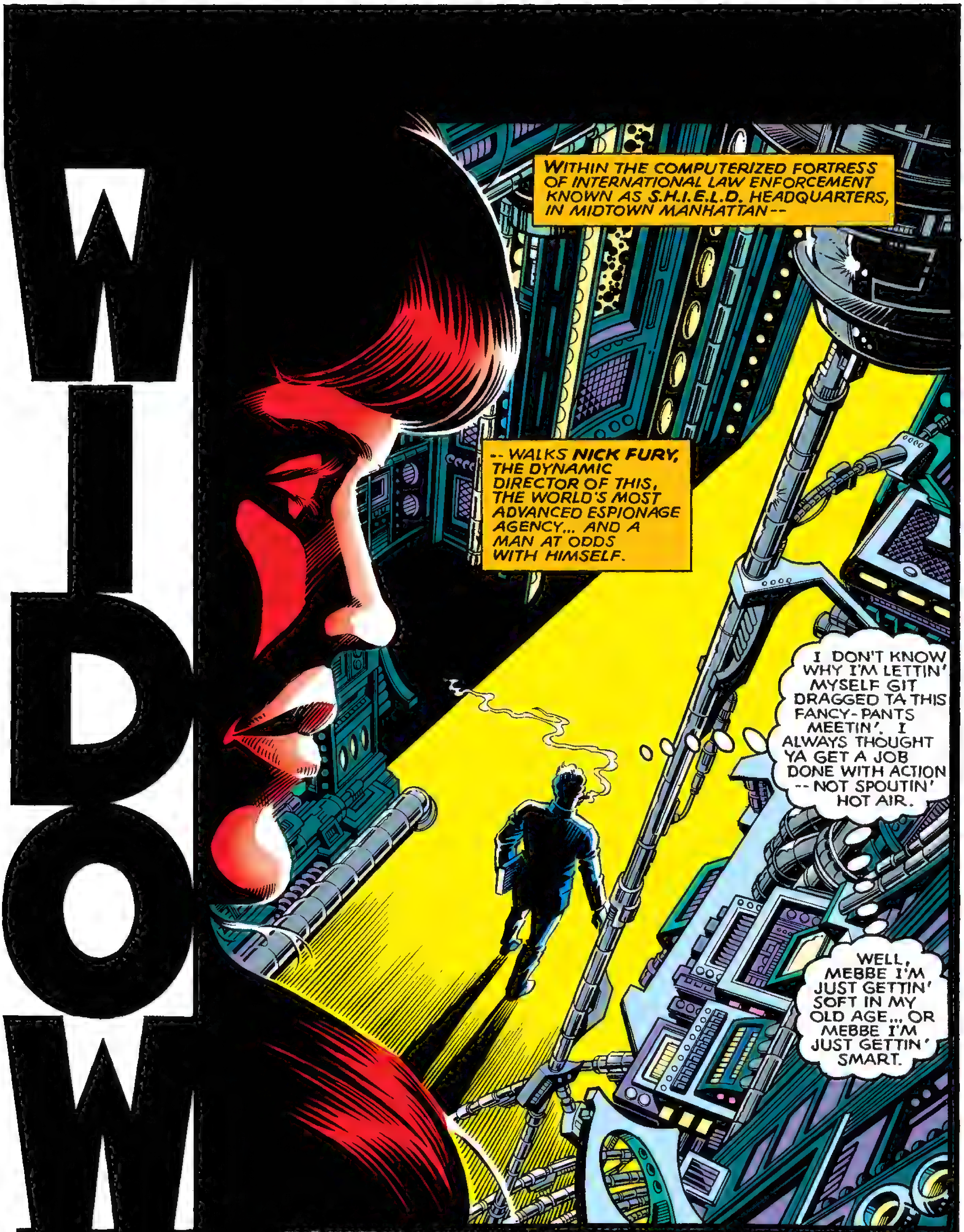
WIDOW


WITHIN THE COMPUTERIZED FORTRESS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT KNOWN AS S.H.I.E.L.D. HEADQUARTERS, IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN--
-- WALKS NICK FURY, THE DYNAMIC DIRECTOR OF THIS, THE WORLD'S MOST ADVANCED ESPIONAGE AGENCY... AND A MAN AT ODDS WITH HIMSELF.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I'M LETTIN' MYSELF GIT DRAGGED TA THIS FANCY-PANTS MEETIN'. I ALWAYS THOUGHT YA GET A JOB DONE WITH ACTION -- NOT SPOUTIN' HOT AIR.
WELL, MEBBE I'M JUST GETTIN' SOFT IN MY OLD AGE... OR MEBBE I'M JUST GETTIN' SMART.

THE FIRST IN A STUNNING NEW SERIES OF CLOAK-AND-DAGGER CLASSICS, CLANDESTINELY CONCEIVED BY:

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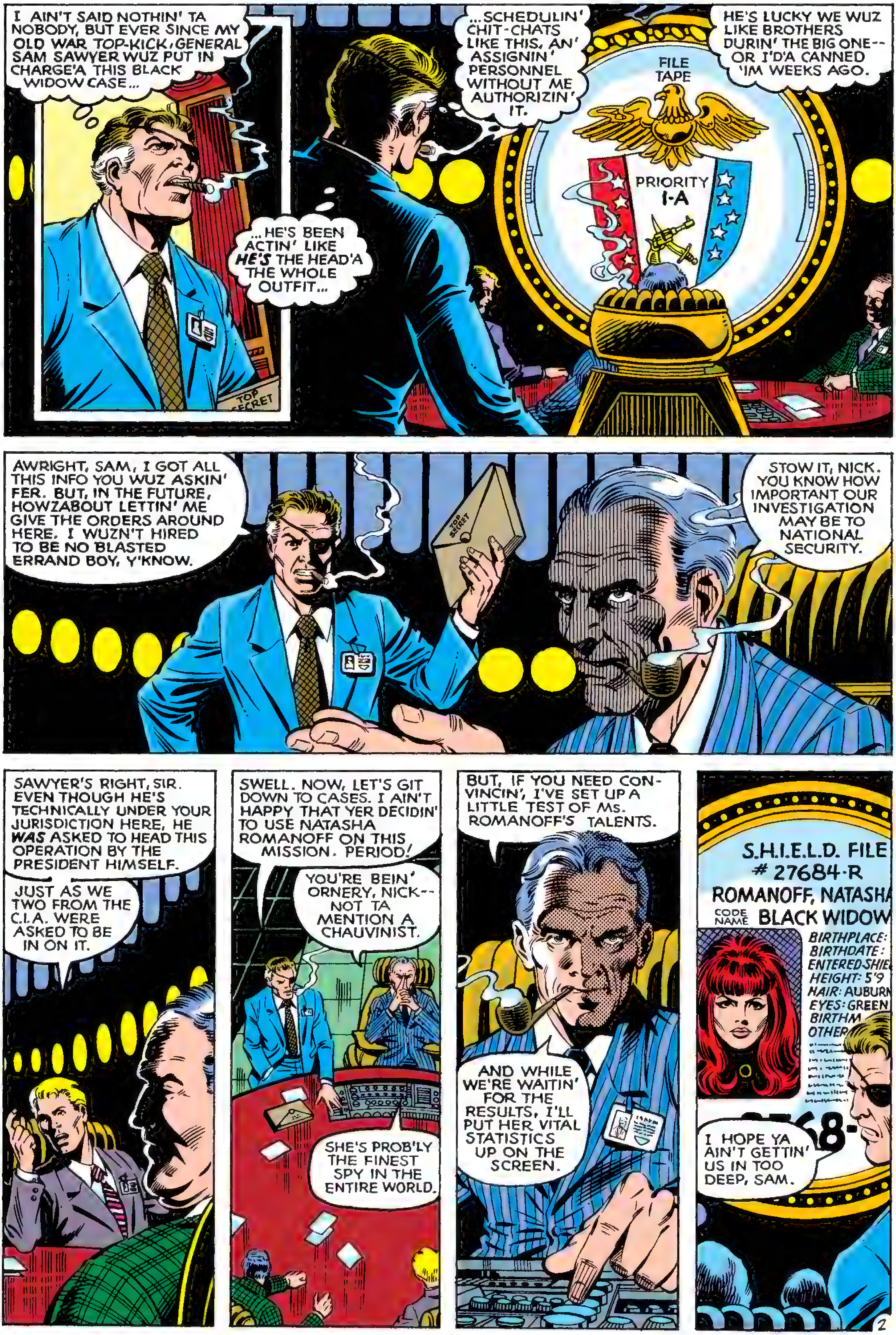
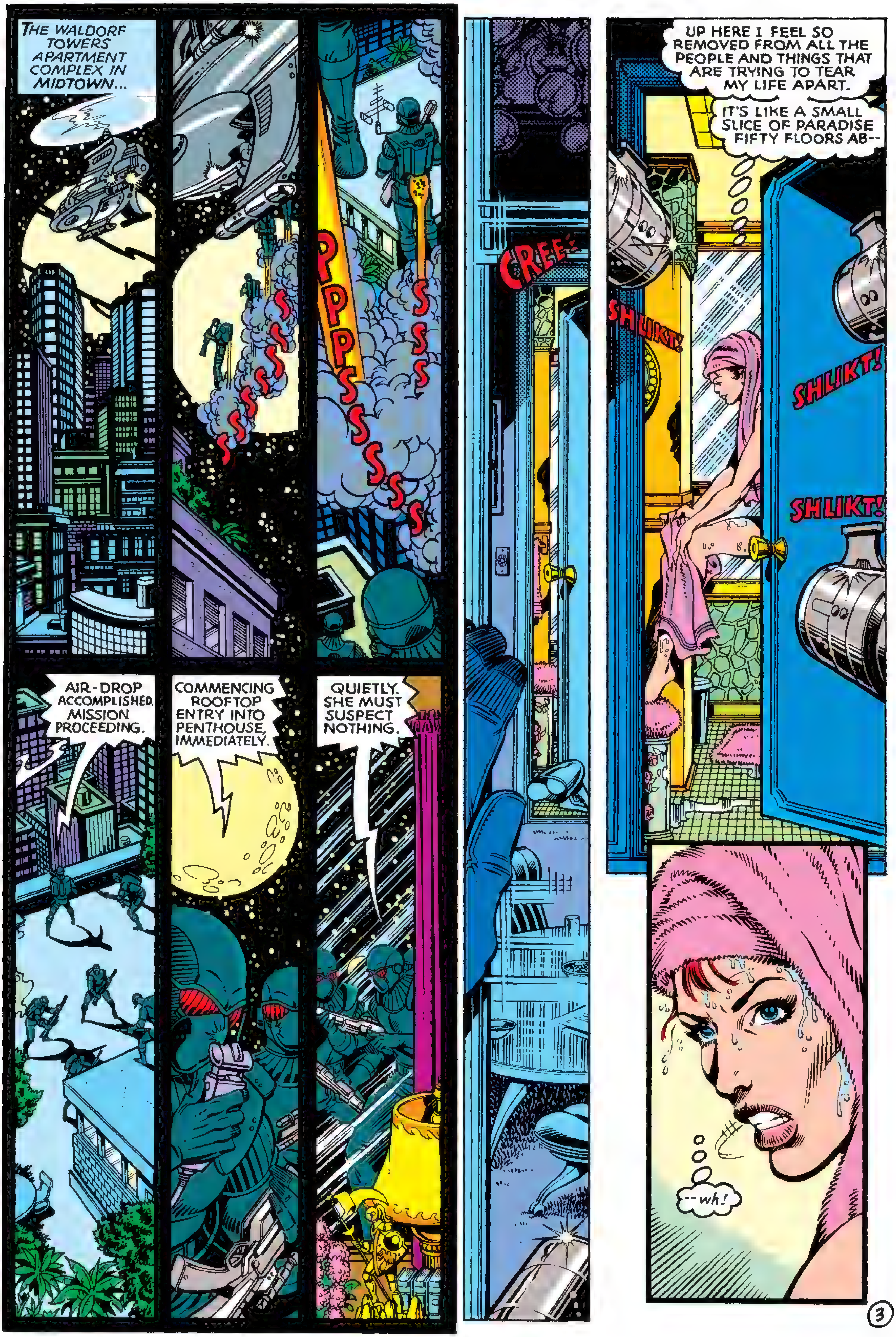
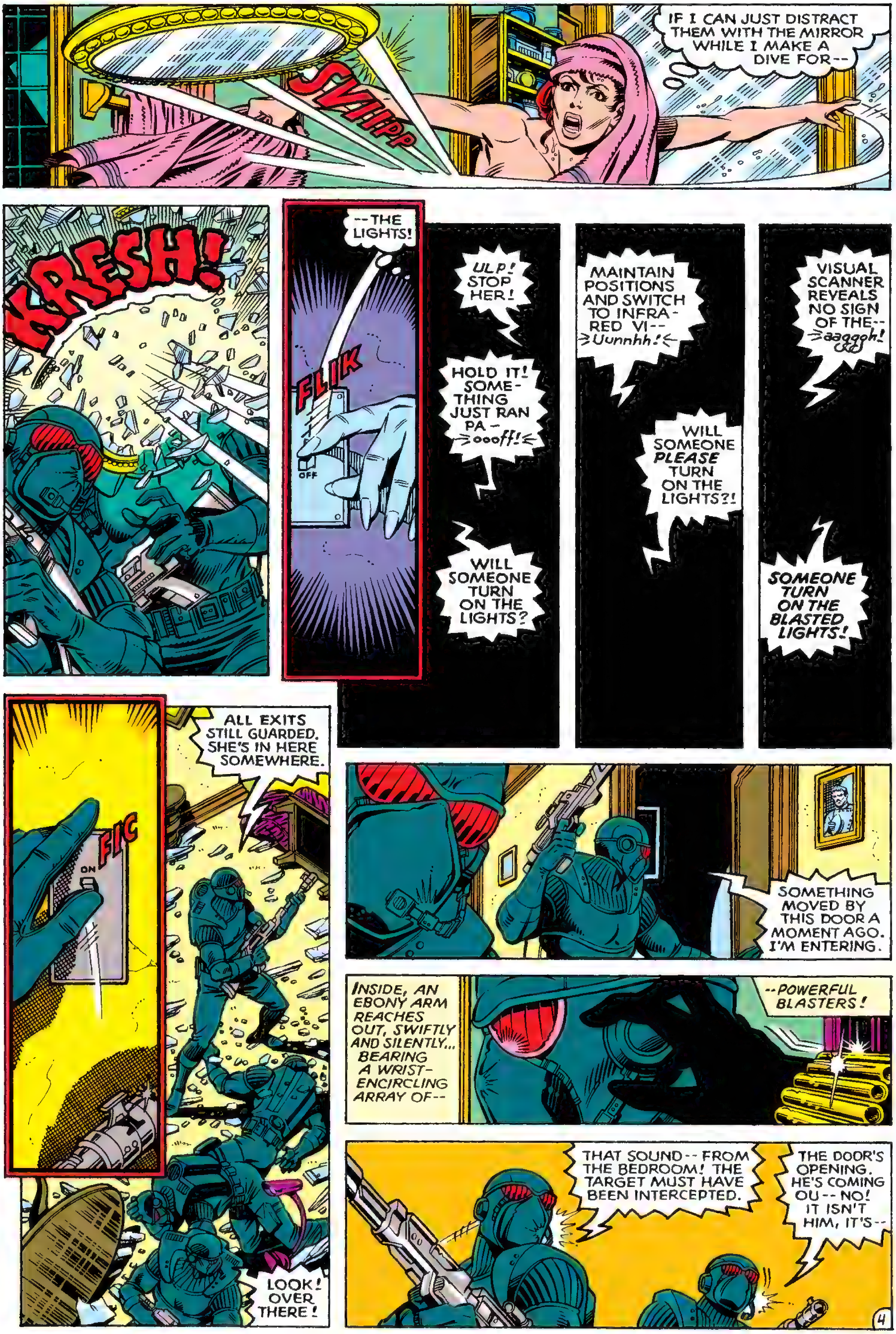
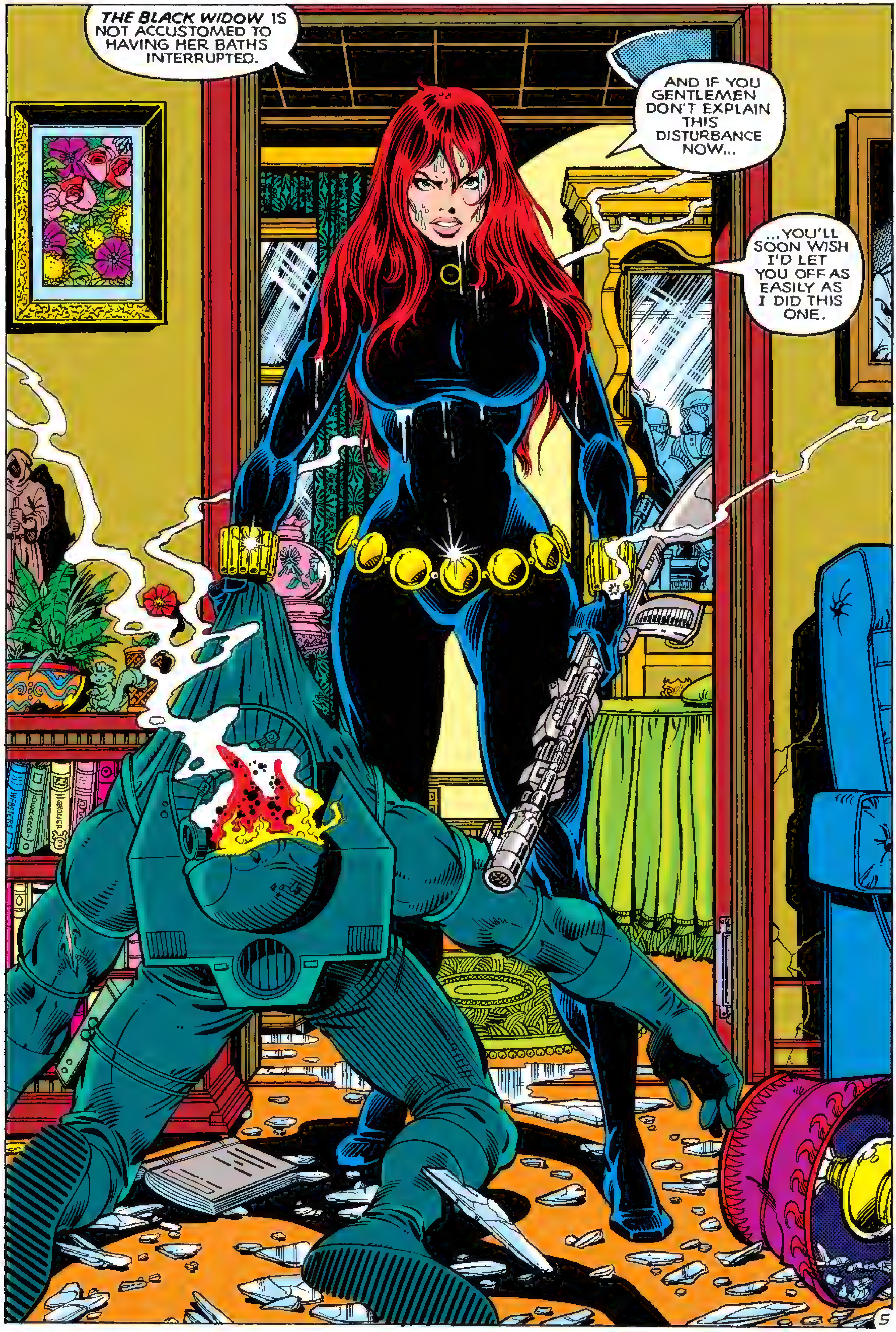
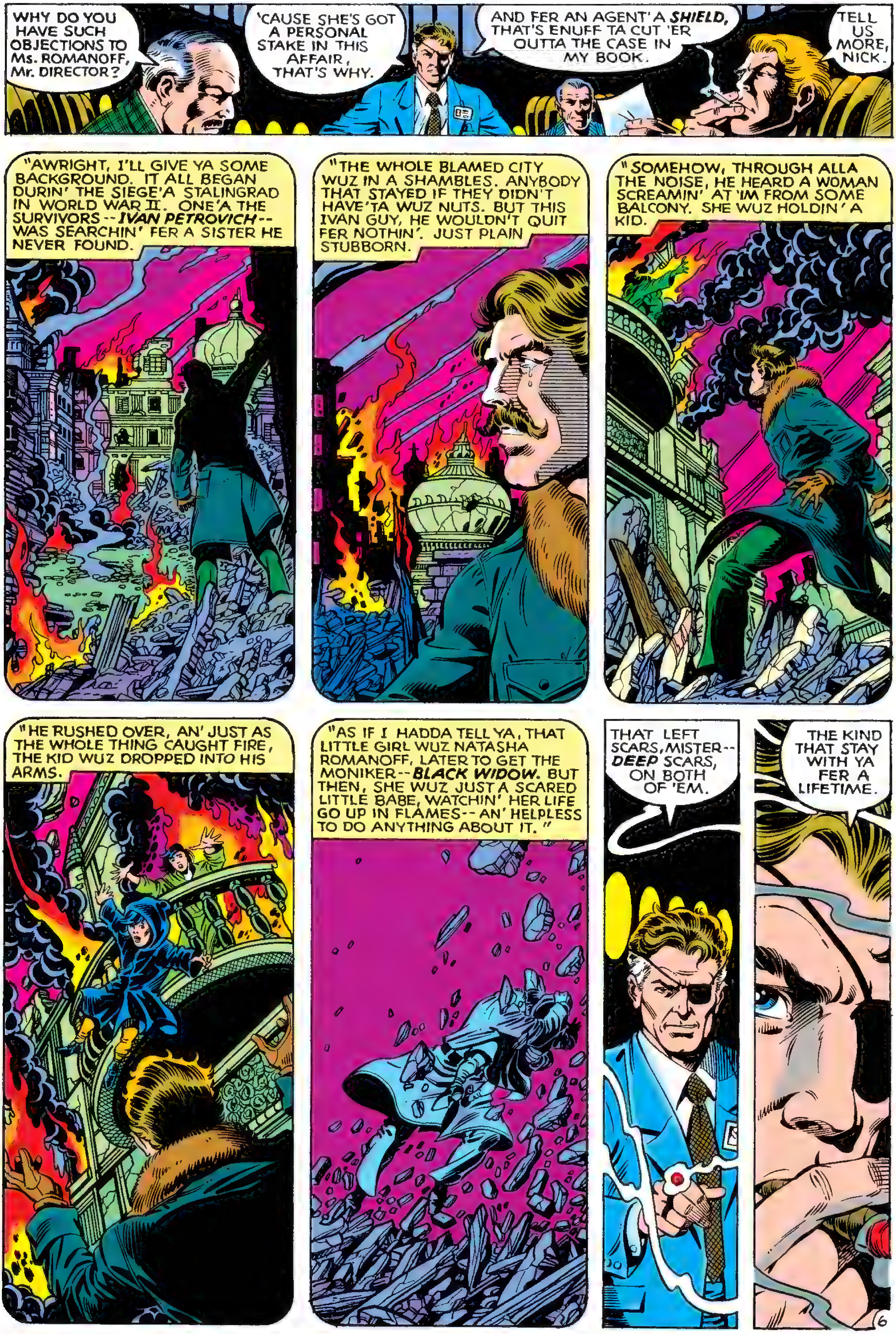
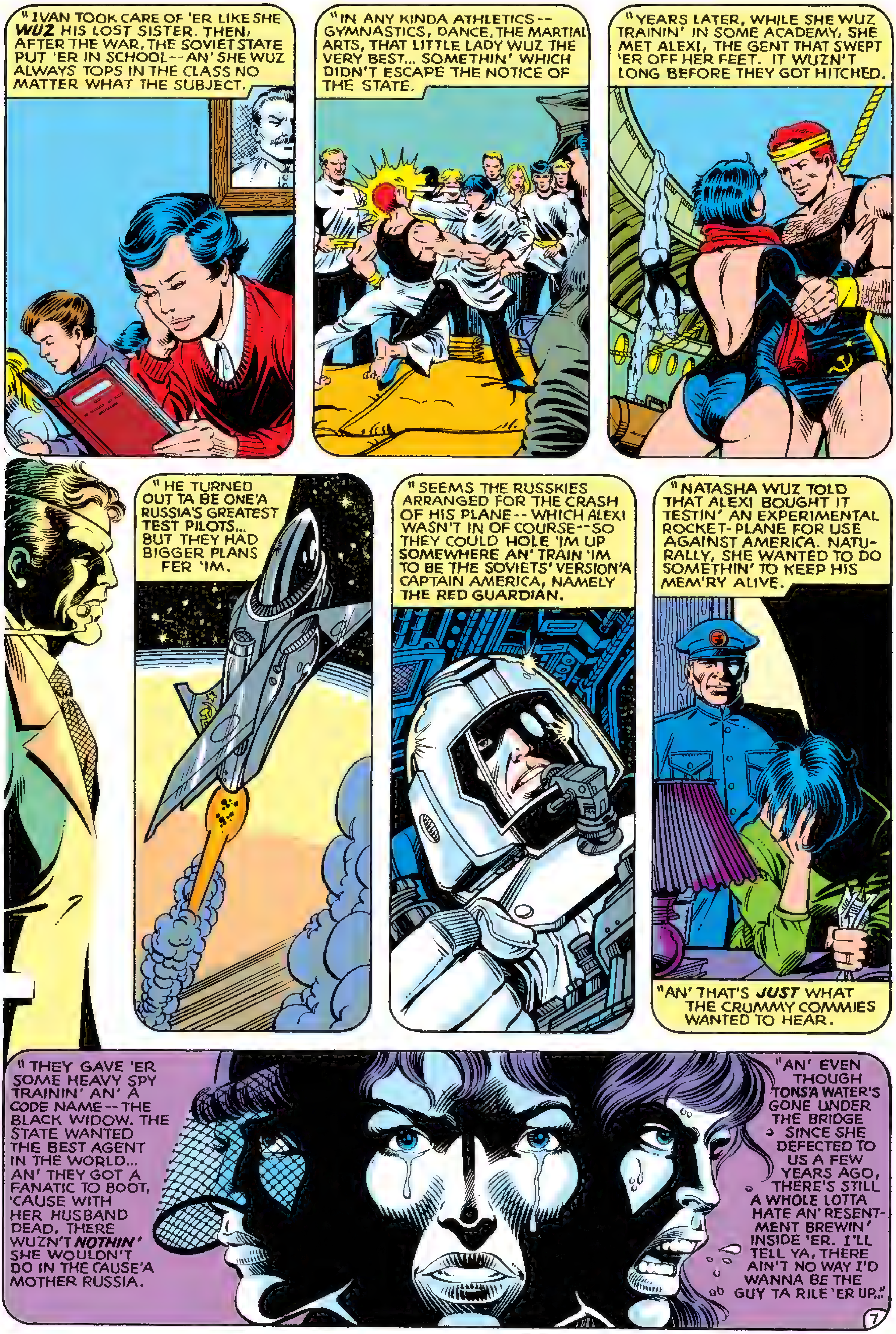

I AIN'T SAID NOTHIN' TA NOBODY, BUT EVER SINCE MY OLD WAR TOP-KICK, GENERAL SAM SAWYER WUZ PUT IN CHARGE'A THIS BLACK WIDOW CASE...
TOP SECRET
...HE'S BEEN ACTIN' LIKE HE'S THE HEAD'A THE WHOLE OUTFIT...
...SCHEDULIN' CHIT-CHATS LIKE THIS, AN' ASSIGNIN' PERSONNEL WITHOUT ME AUTHORIZIN' IT.
FILE TAPE
PRIORITY I-A
HE'S LUCKY WE WUZ LIKE BROTHERS DURIN' THE BIG ONE-- OR I'D'A CANNED 'IM WEEKS AGO.
AWRIGHT, SAM, I GOT ALL THIS INFO YOU WUZ ASKIN' FER. BUT, IN THE FUTURE, HOWZABOUT LETTIN' ME GIVE THE ORDERS AROUND HERE. I WUZN'T HIRED TO BE NO BLASTED ERRAND BOY, Y'KNOW.
TOP SECRET
STOW IT, NICK. YOU KNOW HOW IMPORTANT OUR INVESTIGATION MAY BE TO NATIONAL SECURITY.
SAWYER'S RIGHT, SIR. EVEN THOUGH HE'S TECHNICALLY UNDER YOUR JURISDICTION HERE, HE WAS ASKED TO HEAD THIS OPERATION BY THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF.
JUST AS WE TWO FROM THE C.I.A. WERE ASKED TO BE IN ON IT.
SWELL. NOW, LET'S GIT DOWN TO CASES. I AIN'T HAPPY THAT YER DECIDIN' TO USE NATASHA ROMANOFF ON THIS MISSION. PERIOD!
YOU'RE BEIN' ORNERY, NICK-- NOT TA MENTION A CHAUVINIST.
SHE'S PROB'LY THE FINEST SPY IN THE ENTIRE WORLD.
BUT, IF YOU NEED CONVINCIN', I'VE SET UP A LITTLE TEST OF MS. ROMANOFF'S TALENTS.
AND WHILE WE'RE WAITIN' FOR THE RESULTS, I'LL PUT HER VITAL STATISTICS UP ON THE SCREEN.
S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE # 27684-R
ROMANOFF, NATASHA
CODE NAME BLACK WIDOW
BIRTHPLACE:
BIRTHDATE:
ENTERED SHIE
HEIGHT: 5'9
HAIR: AUBURN
EYES: GREEN
BIRTHM
OTHER
768-
I HOPE YA AIN'T GETTIN' US IN TOO DEEP, SAM.

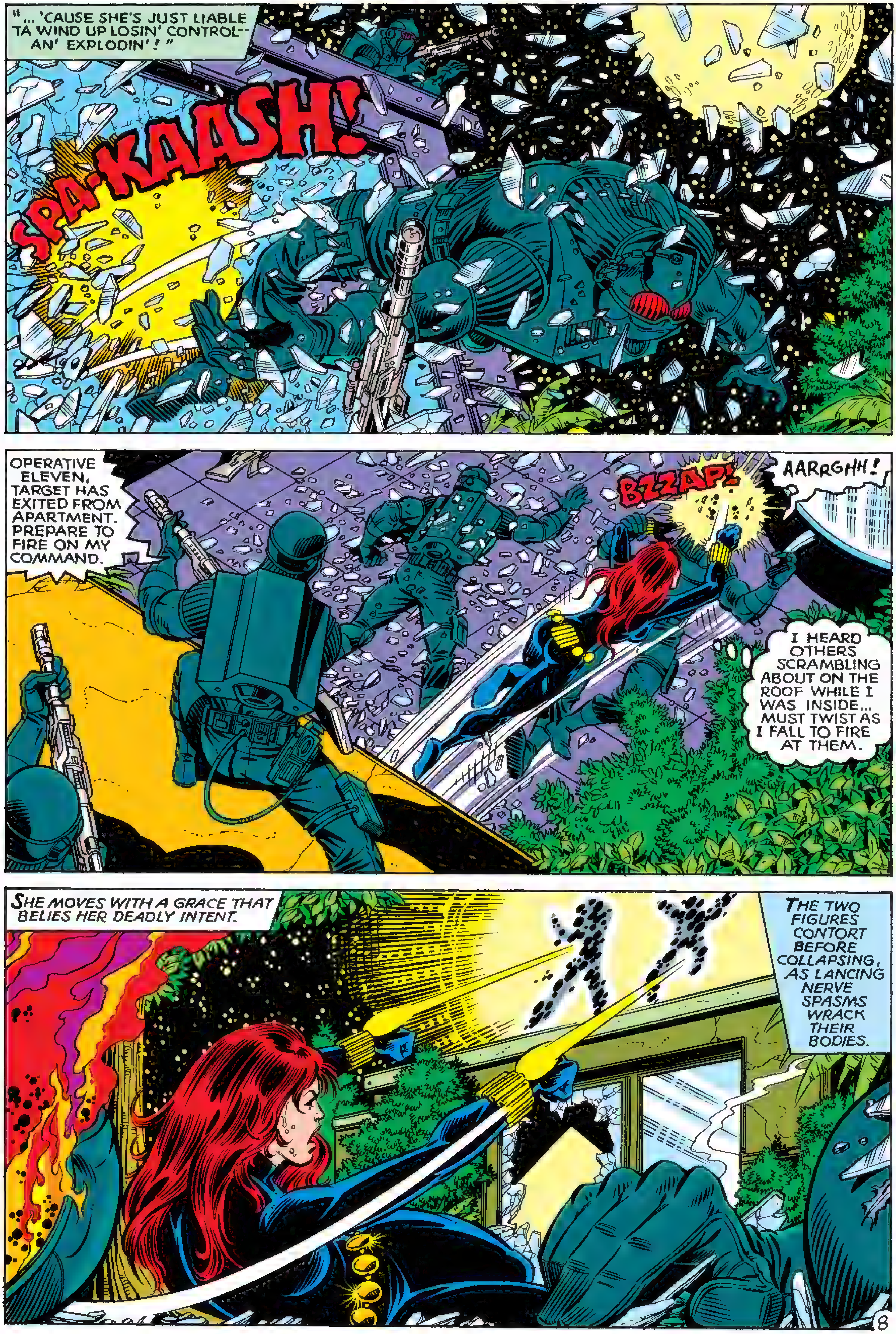

THE WALDORF TOWERS APARTMENT COMPLEX IN MIDTOWN...
SSSSSSSS
PPPSSSSSSS
SSSS
AIR-DROP ACCOMPLISHED. MISSION PROCEEDING.
COMMENCING ROOFTOP ENTRY INTO PENTHOUSE, IMMEDIATELY.
QUIETLY. SHE MUST SUSPECT NOTHING.
CREE
UP HERE I FEEL SO REMOVED FROM ALL THE PEOPLE AND THINGS THAT ARE TRYING TO TEAR MY LIFE APART.
IT'S LIKE A SMALL SLICE OF PARADISE FIFTY FLOORS AB--
SHLIKT!
SHLIKT!
SHLIKT!
--wh!

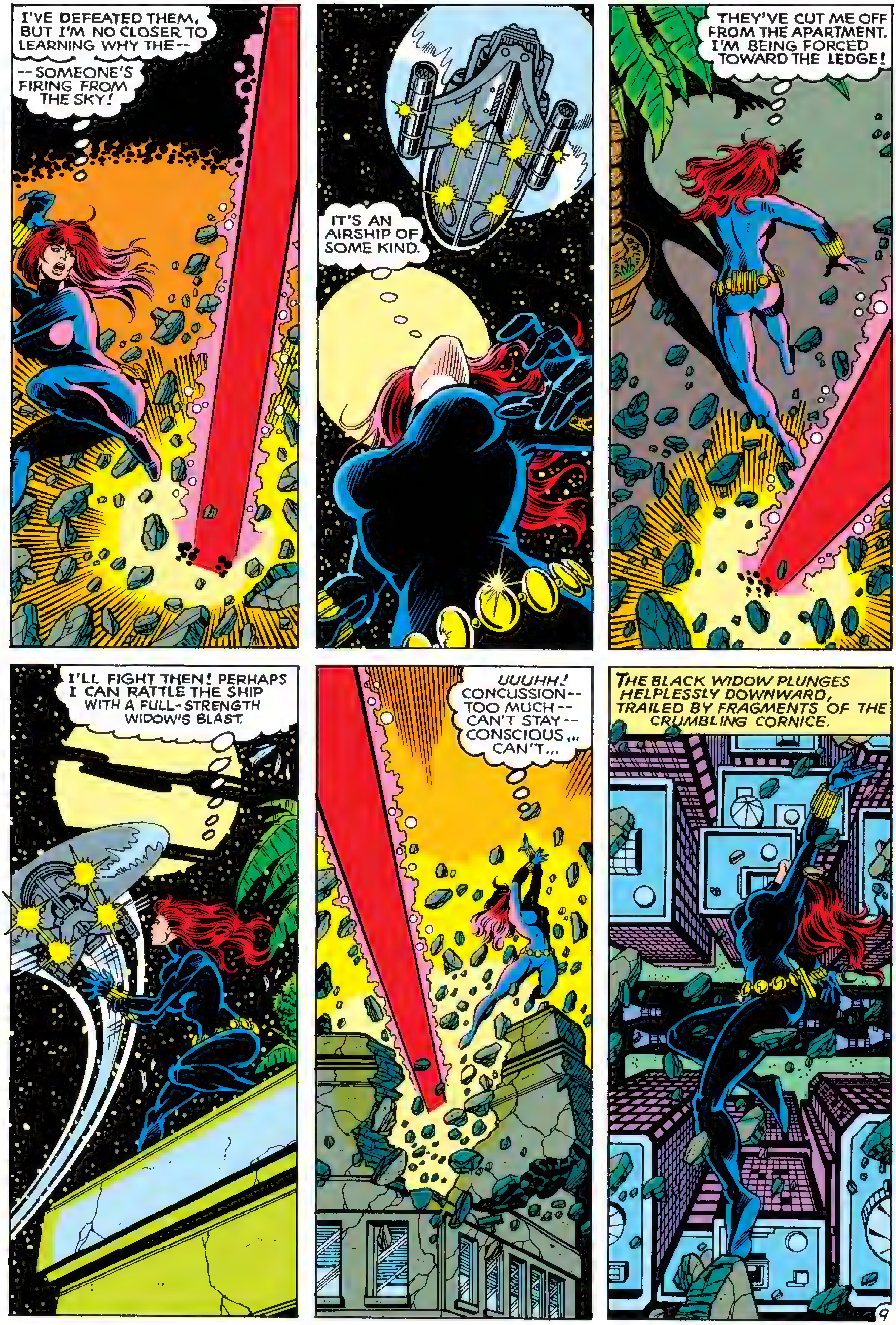

IF I CAN JUST DISTRACT THEM WITH THE MIRROR WHILE I MAKE A DIVE FOR--
SVIIIPP
KRESH!
--THE LIGHTS!
FLIK
OFF
ULP! STOP HER!
HOLD IT! SOMETHING JUST RAN PA- ≥oooff!≤
WILL SOMEONE TURN ON THE LIGHTS?
MAINTAIN POSITIONS AND SWITCH TO INFRA-RED VI-- ≥Uunnhh!≤
WILL SOMEONE *PLEASE* TURN ON THE LIGHTS?!
VISUAL SCANNER REVEALS NO SIGN OF THE-- ≥aaggh!≤
SOMEONE TURN ON THE BLASTED LIGHTS!
FIC
ON
ALL EXITS STILL GUARDED. SHE'S IN HERE SOMEWHERE.
LOOK! OVER THERE!
SOMETHING MOVED BY THIS DOOR A MOMENT AGO. I'M ENTERING.
INSIDE, AN EBONY ARM REACHES OUT, SWIFTLY AND SILENTLY... BEARING A WRIST-ENCIRCLING ARRAY OF--
--POWERFUL BLASTERS!
THAT SOUND--FROM THE BEDROOM! THE TARGET MUST HAVE BEEN INTERCEPTED.
THE DOOR'S OPENING. HE'S COMING OU--NO! IT ISN'T HIM, IT'S--

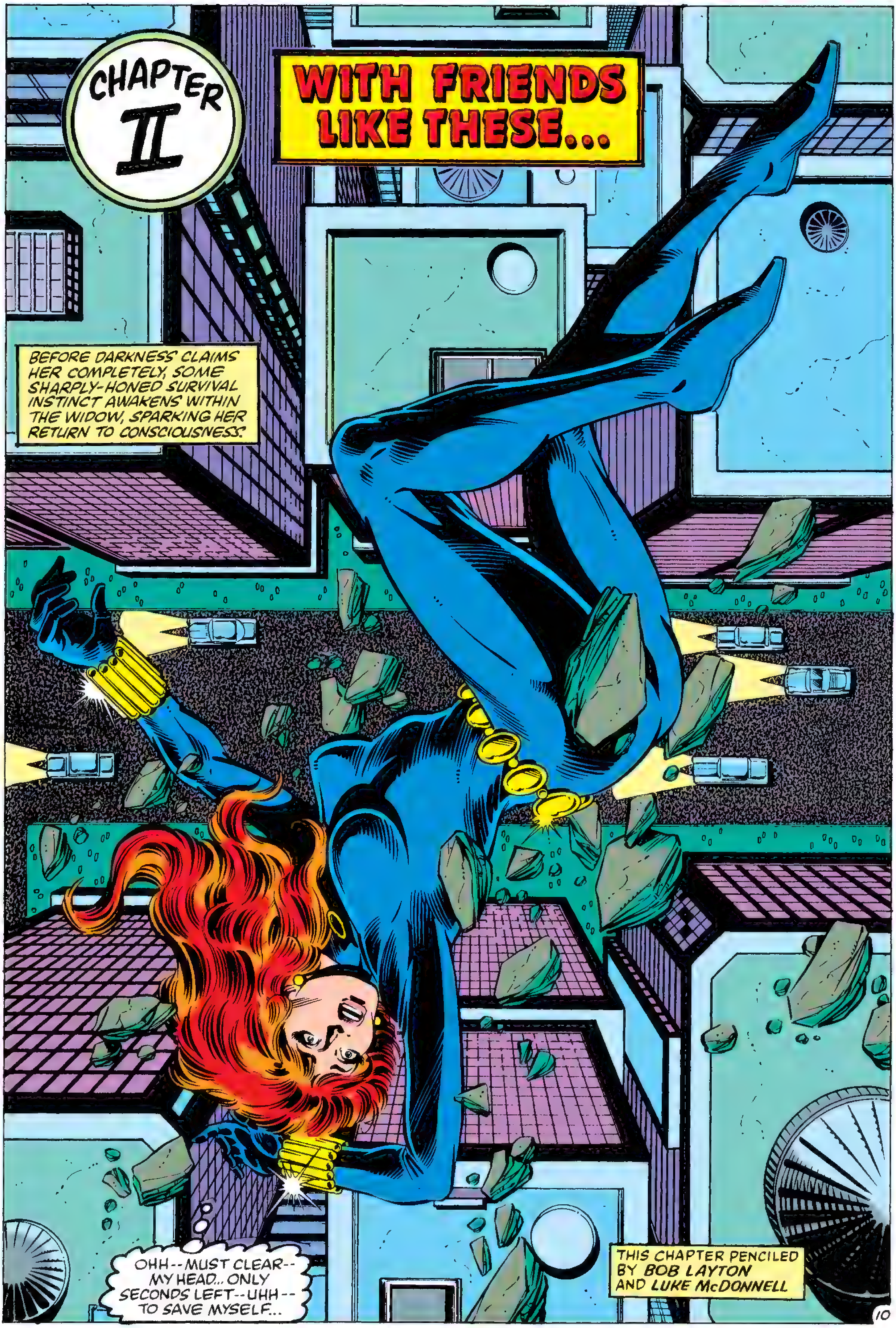

THE BLACK WIDOW IS NOT ACCUSTOMED TO HAVING HER BATHS INTERRUPTED.
AND IF YOU GENTLEMEN DON'T EXPLAIN THIS DISTURBANCE NOW...
...YOU'LL SOON WISH I'D LET YOU OFF AS EASILY AS I DID THIS ONE.
WEBSTERS
BERARDI
GROLIER

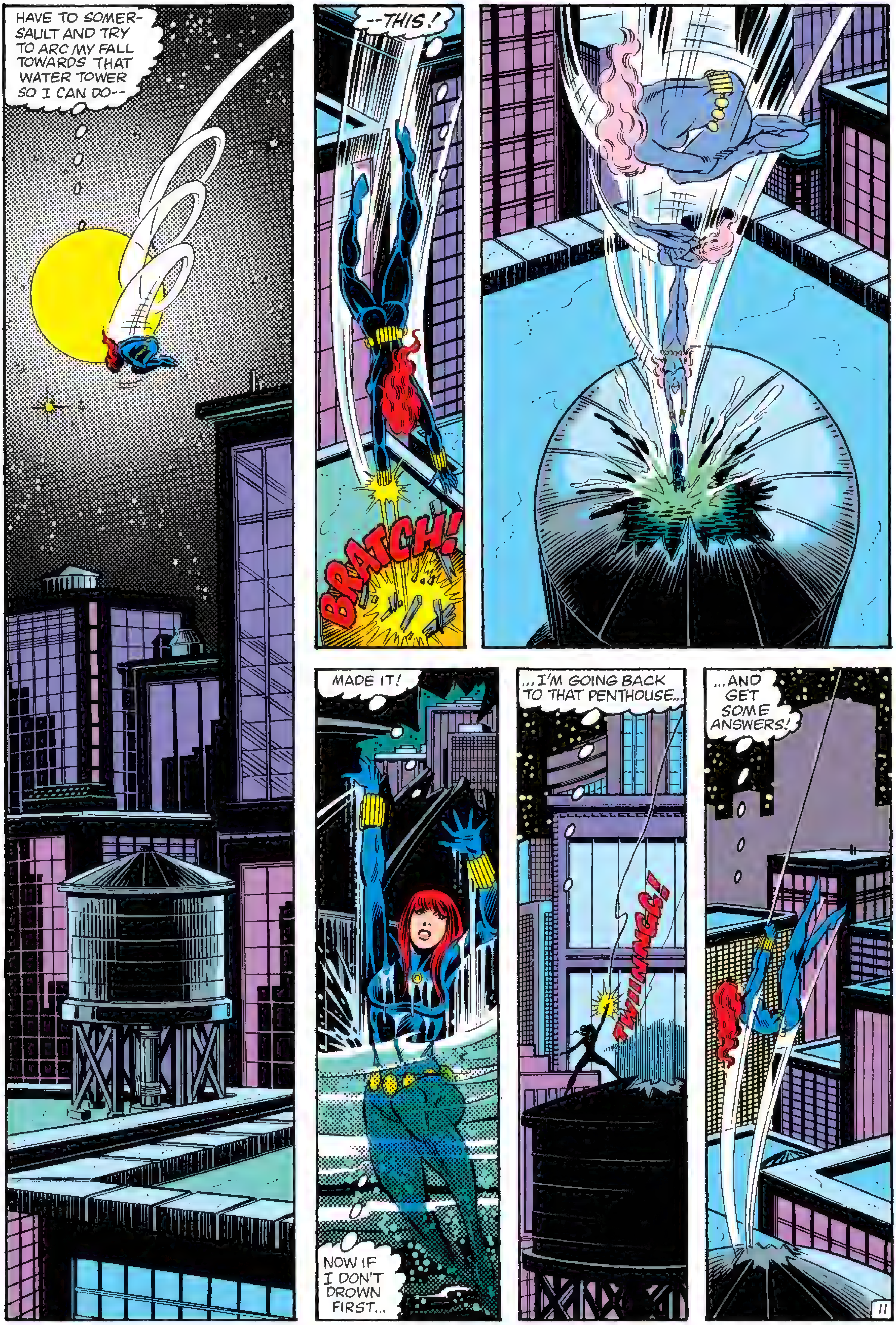

WHY DO YOU HAVE SUCH OBJECTIONS TO Ms. ROMANOFF, Mr. DIRECTOR?
'CAUSE SHE'S GOT A PERSONAL STAKE IN THIS AFFAIR, THAT'S WHY.
AND FER AN AGENT'A **SHIELD**, THAT'S ENUFF TA CUT 'ER OUTTA THE CASE IN MY BOOK.
TELL US MORE, NICK.
"AWRIGHT, I'LL GIVE YA SOME BACKGROUND. IT ALL BEGAN DURIN' THE SIEGE'A STALINGRAD IN WORLD WAR II. ONE'A THE SURVIVORS--***IVAN PETROVICH***--WAS SEARCHIN' FER A SISTER HE NEVER FOUND.
"THE WHOLE BLAMED CITY WUZ IN A SHAMBLES. ANYBODY THAT STAYED IF THEY DIDN'T HAVE'TA WUZ NUTS. BUT THIS IVAN GUY, HE WOULDN'T QUIT FER NOTHIN'. JUST PLAIN STUBBORN.
"SOMEHOW, THROUGH ALLA THE NOISE, HE HEARD A WOMAN SCREAMIN' AT 'IM FROM SOME BALCONY. SHE WUZ HOLDIN' A KID.
"HE RUSHED OVER, AN' JUST AS THE WHOLE THING CAUGHT FIRE, THE KID WUZ DROPPED INTO HIS ARMS.
"AS IF I HADDA TELL YA, THAT LITTLE GIRL WUZ NATASHA ROMANOFF, LATER TO GET THE MONIKER--***BLACK WIDOW***. BUT THEN, SHE WUZ JUST A SCARED LITTLE BABE, WATCHIN' HER LIFE GO UP IN FLAMES--AN' HELPLESS TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT."
THAT LEFT SCARS, MISTER--***DEEP*** SCARS, ON BOTH OF 'EM.
THE KIND THAT STAY WITH YA FER A LIFETIME.

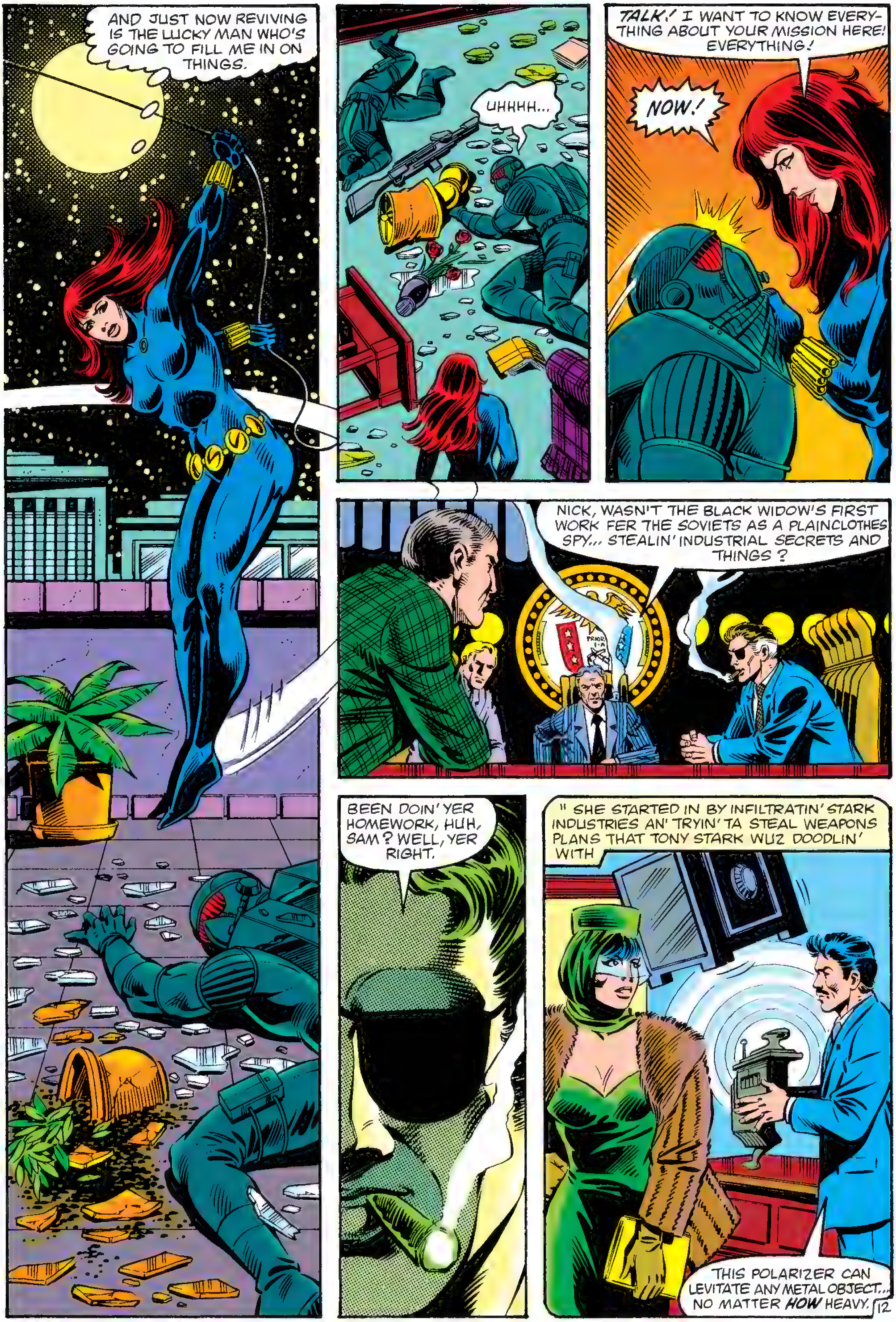

"IVAN TOOK CARE OF 'ER LIKE SHE *WUZ* HIS LOST SISTER. THEN, AFTER THE WAR, THE SOVIET STATE PUT 'ER IN SCHOOL--AN' SHE WUZ ALWAYS TOPS IN THE CLASS NO MATTER WHAT THE SUBJECT.
"IN ANY KINDA ATHLETICS--GYMNASTICS, DANCE, THE MARTIAL ARTS, THAT LITTLE LADY WUZ THE VERY BEST... SOMETHIN' WHICH DIDN'T ESCAPE THE NOTICE OF THE STATE.
"YEARS LATER, WHILE SHE WUZ TRAININ' IN SOME ACADEMY, SHE MET ALEXI, THE GENT THAT SWEPT 'ER OFF HER FEET. IT WUZN'T LONG BEFORE THEY GOT HITCHED.
"HE TURNED OUT TA BE ONE'A RUSSIA'S GREATEST TEST PILOTS... BUT THEY HAD BIGGER PLANS FER 'IM.
"SEEMS THE RUSSKIES ARRANGED FOR THE CRASH OF HIS PLANE--WHICH ALEXI WASN'T IN OF COURSE--SO THEY COULD HOLE 'IM UP SOMEWHERE AN' TRAIN 'IM TO BE THE SOVIETS' VERSION'A CAPTAIN AMERICA, NAMELY THE RED GUARDIAN.
"NATASHA WUZ TOLD THAT ALEXI BOUGHT IT TESTIN' AN EXPERIMENTAL ROCKET-PLANE FOR USE AGAINST AMERICA. NATURALLY, SHE WANTED TO DO SOMETHIN' TO KEEP HIS MEM'RY ALIVE.
"AN' THAT'S *JUST* WHAT THE CRUMMY COMMIES WANTED TO HEAR.
"THEY GAVE 'ER SOME HEAVY SPY TRAININ' AN' A CODE NAME--THE BLACK WIDOW. THE STATE WANTED THE BEST AGENT IN THE WORLD... AN' THEY GOT A FANATIC TO BOOT, 'CAUSE WITH HER HUSBAND DEAD, THERE WUZN'T *NOTHIN'* SHE WOULDN'T DO IN THE CAUSE'A MOTHER RUSSIA.
"AN' EVEN THOUGH TONS'A WATER'S GONE UNDER THE BRIDGE SINCE SHE DEFECTED TO US A FEW YEARS AGO, THERE'S STILL A WHOLE LOTTA HATE AN' RESENTMENT BREWIN' INSIDE 'ER. I'LL TELL YA, THERE AIN'T NO WAY I'D WANNA BE THE GUY TA RILE 'ER UP..."

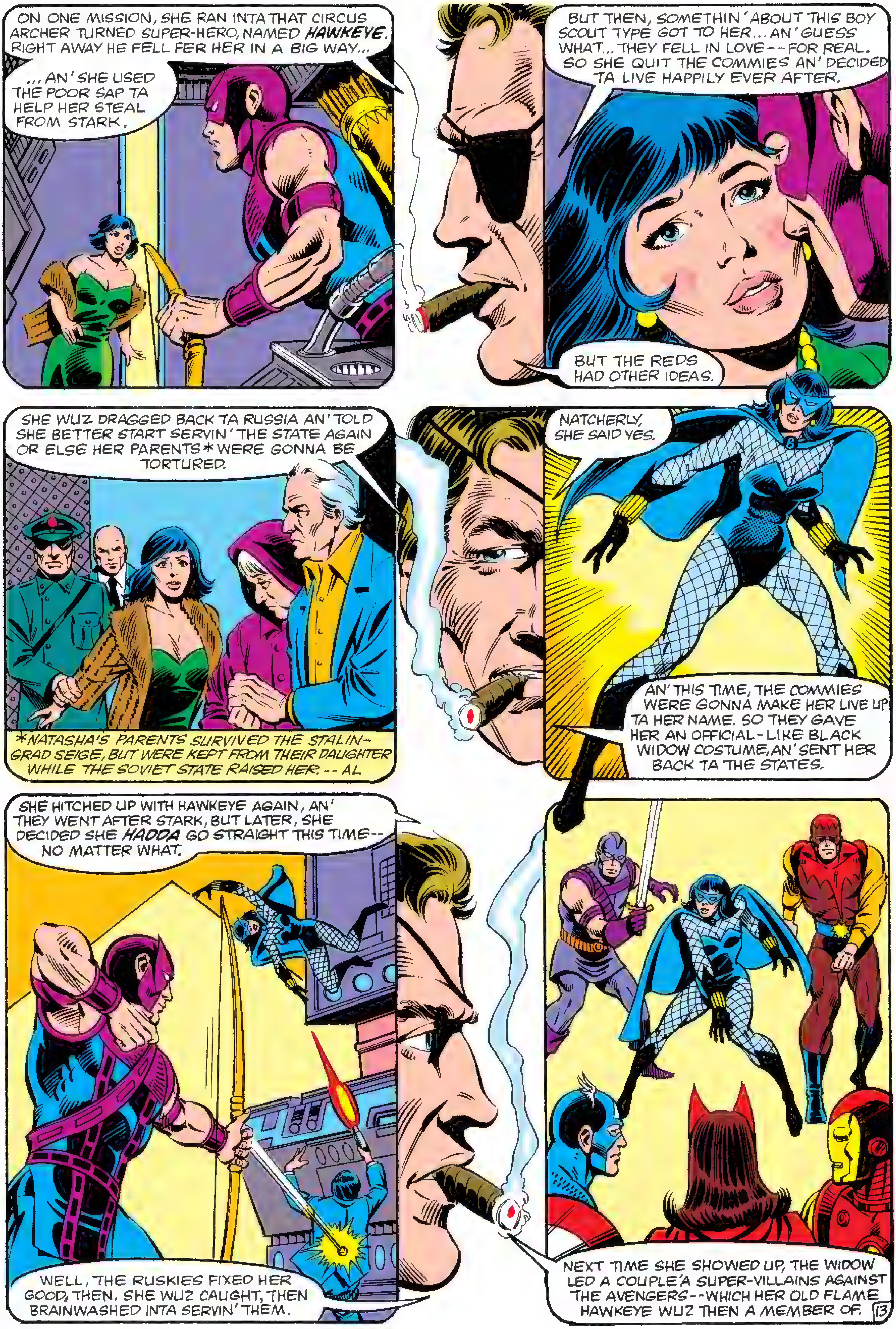

"... 'CAUSE SHE'S JUST LIABLE TA WIND UP LOSIN' CONTROL-- AN' EXPLODIN'!"
SPA-KAASH!
OPERATIVE ELEVEN, TARGET HAS EXITED FROM APARTMENT. PREPARE TO FIRE ON MY COMMAND.
BZZAP!
AARRGHH!
I HEARD OTHERS SCRAMBLING ABOUT ON THE ROOF WHILE I WAS INSIDE... MUST TWIST AS I FALL TO FIRE AT THEM.
SHE MOVES WITH A GRACE THAT BELIES HER DEADLY INTENT.
THE TWO FIGURES CONTORT BEFORE COLLAPSING, AS LANCING NERVE SPASMS WRACK THEIR BODIES.

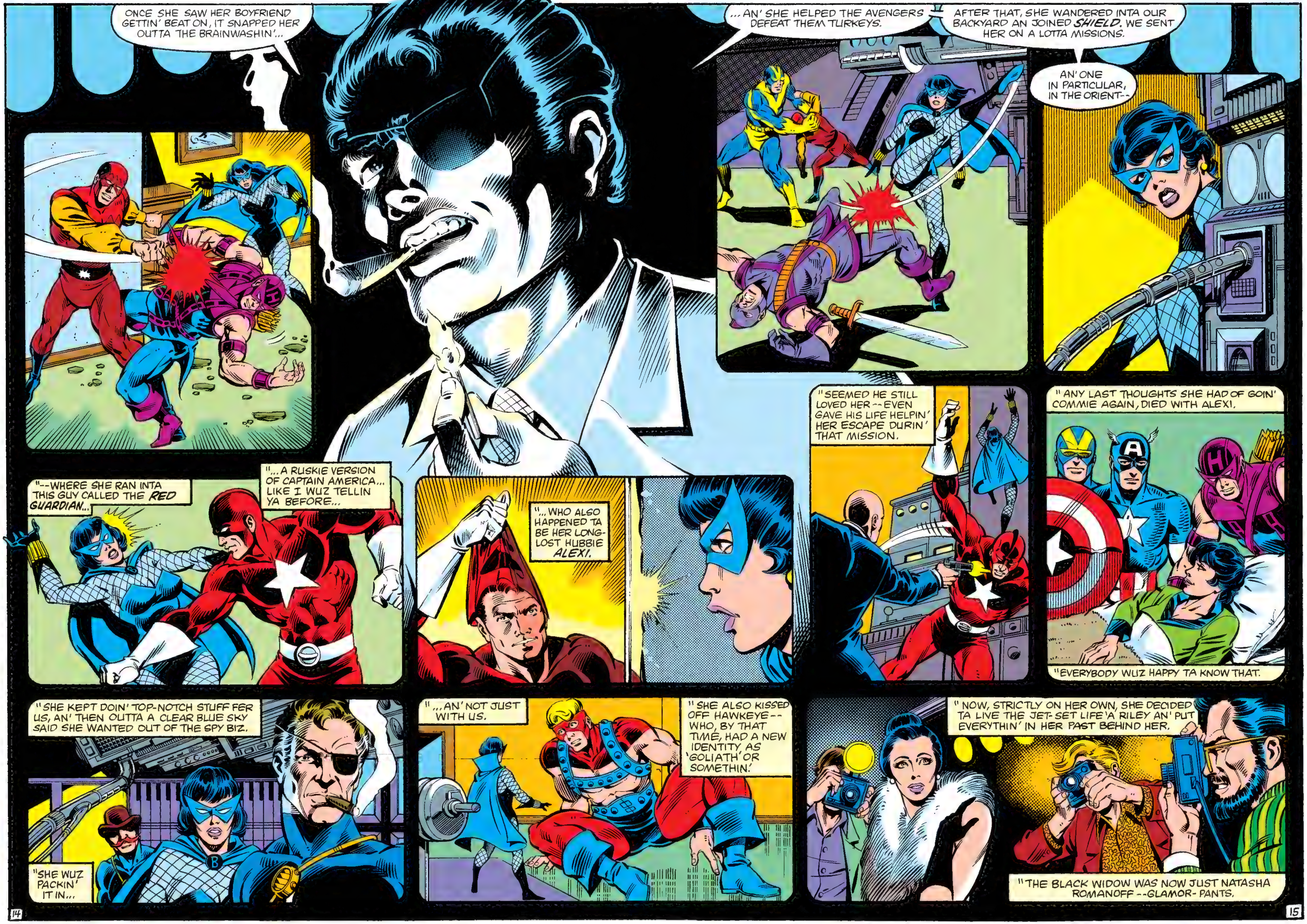

I'VE DEFEATED THEM, BUT I'M NO CLOSER TO LEARNING WHY THE--
-- SOMEONE'S FIRING FROM THE SKY!
IT'S AN AIRSHIP OF SOME KIND.
THEY'VE CUT ME OFF FROM THE APARTMENT. I'M BEING FORCED TOWARD THE LEDGE!
I'LL FIGHT THEN! PERHAPS I CAN RATTLE THE SHIP WITH A FULL-STRENGTH WIDOW'S BLAST.
UUUHH! CONCUSSION-- TOO MUCH-- CAN'T STAY-- CONSCIOUS... CAN'T...
THE BLACK WIDOW PLUNGES HELPLESSLY DOWNWARD, TRAILED BY FRAGMENTS OF THE CRUMBLING CORNICE.

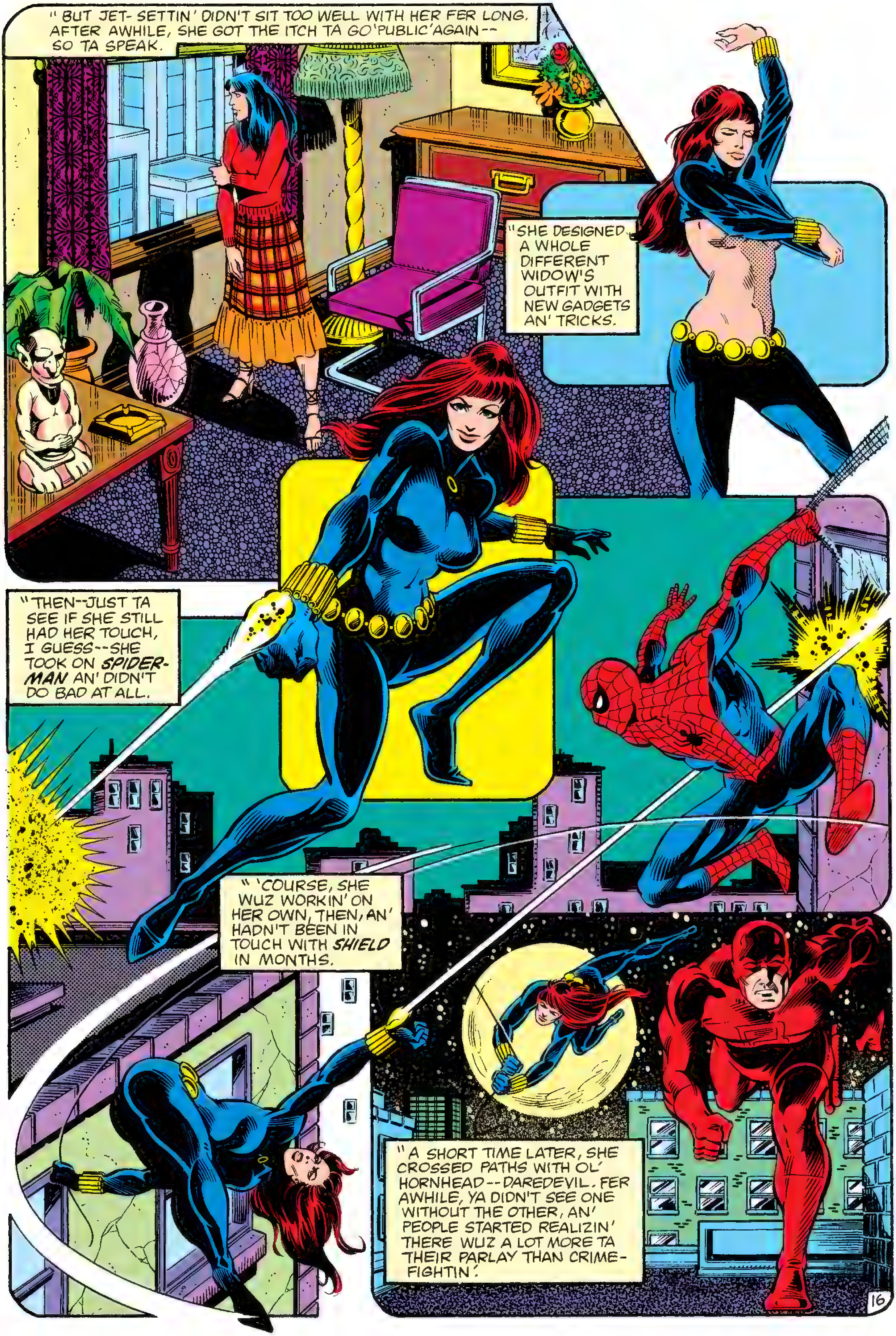

CHAPTER II
WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...
BEFORE DARKNESS CLAIMS HER COMPLETELY, SOME SHARPLY-HONED SURVIVAL INSTINCT AWAKENS WITHIN THE WIDOW, SPARKING HER RETURN TO CONSCIOUSNESS.
OHH--MUST CLEAR--MY HEAD... ONLY SECONDS LEFT--UHH--TO SAVE MYSELF...
THIS CHAPTER PENCILED BY BOB LAYTON AND LUKE McDONNELL

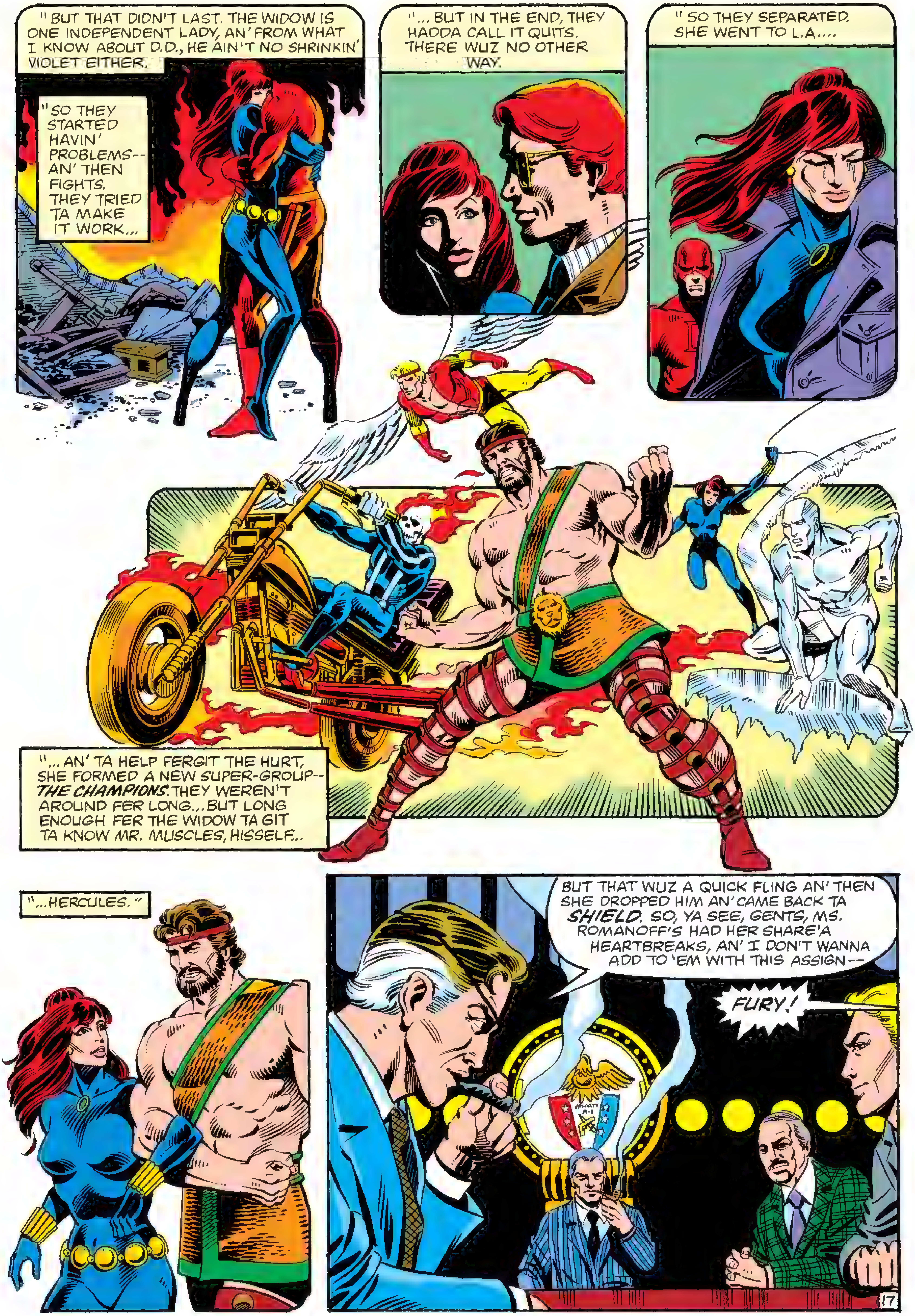

HAVE TO SOMERSAULT AND TRY TO ARC MY FALL TOWARDS THAT WATER TOWER SO I CAN DO--
--THIS!
BRATCH!
MADE IT!
NOW IF I DON'T DROWN FIRST...
...I'M GOING BACK TO THAT PENTHOUSE...
TWIINNGG!!
...AND GET SOME ANSWERS!

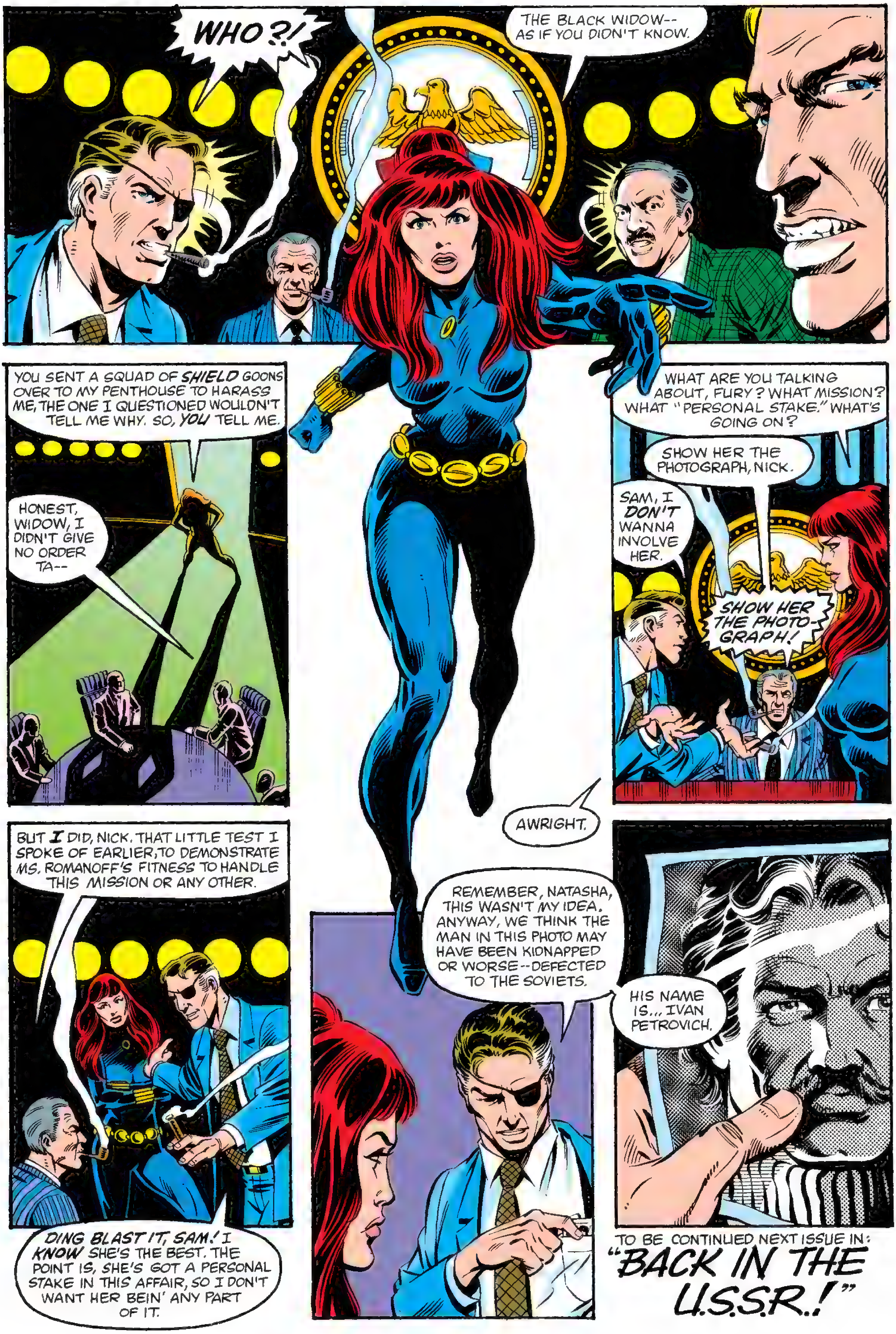

AND JUST NOW REVIVING IS THE LUCKY MAN WHO'S GOING TO FILL ME IN ON THINGS.
UHHHH...
TALK! I WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT YOUR MISSION HERE! EVERYTHING!
NOW!
NICK, WASN'T THE BLACK WIDOW'S FIRST WORK FER THE SOVIETS AS A PLAINCLOTHES SPY... STEALIN' INDUSTRIAL SECRETS AND THINGS?
PRIOR I-A
BEEN DOIN' YER HOMEWORK, HUH, SAM? WELL, YER RIGHT.
" SHE STARTED IN BY INFILTRATIN' STARK INDUSTRIES AN' TRYIN' TA STEAL WEAPONS PLANS THAT TONY STARK WUZ DOODLIN' WITH
THIS POLARIZER CAN LEVITATE ANY METAL OBJECT... NO MATTER *HOW* HEAVY.


ON ONE MISSION, SHE RAN INTA THAT CIRCUS ARCHER TURNED SUPER-HERO, NAMED **HAWKEYE**. RIGHT AWAY HE FELL FER HER IN A BIG WAY...
... AN' SHE USED THE POOR SAP TA HELP HER STEAL FROM STARK.
BUT THEN, SOMETHIN' ABOUT THIS BOY SCOUT TYPE GOT TO HER... AN' GUESS WHAT... THEY FELL IN LOVE--FOR REAL. SO SHE QUIT THE COMMIES AN' DECIDED TA LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.
BUT THE REDS HAD OTHER IDEAS.
SHE WUZ DRAGGED BACK TA RUSSIA AN' TOLD SHE BETTER START SERVIN' THE STATE AGAIN OR ELSE HER PARENTS* WERE GONNA BE TORTURED.
*NATASHA'S PARENTS SURVIVED THE STALINGRAD SEIGE, BUT WERE KEPT FROM THEIR DAUGHTER WHILE THE SOVIET STATE RAISED HER. -- AL
NATCHERLY, SHE SAID YES.
AN' THIS TIME, THE COMMIES WERE GONNA MAKE HER LIVE UP TA HER NAME. SO THEY GAVE HER AN OFFICIAL-LIKE BLACK WIDOW COSTUME, AN' SENT HER BACK TA THE STATES.
SHE HITCHED UP WITH HAWKEYE AGAIN, AN' THEY WENT AFTER STARK, BUT LATER, SHE DECIDED SHE *HADDA* GO STRAIGHT THIS TIME-- NO MATTER WHAT.
WELL, THE RUSKIES FIXED HER GOOD, THEN. SHE WUZ CAUGHT, THEN BRAINWASHED INTA SERVIN' THEM.
NEXT TIME SHE SHOWED UP, THE WIDOW LED A COUPLE'A SUPER-VILLAINS AGAINST THE AVENGERS--WHICH HER OLD FLAME HAWKEYE WUZ THEN A MEMBER OF.
13


ONCE SHE SAW HER BOYFRIEND GETTIN' BEAT ON, IT SNAPPED HER OUTTA THE BRAINWASHIN'...
...AN' SHE HELPED THE AVENGERS DEFEAT THEM TURKEYS.
AFTER THAT, SHE WANDERED INTA OUR BACKYARD AN JOINED *SHIELD*. WE SENT HER ON A LOTTA MISSIONS.
AN' ONE IN PARTICULAR, IN THE ORIENT--
"--WHERE SHE RAN INTA THIS GUY CALLED THE *RED GUARDIAN*...
"...A RUSKIE VERSION OF CAPTAIN AMERICA... LIKE I WUZ TELLIN YA BEFORE...
"...WHO ALSO HAPPENED TA BE HER LONG-LOST HUBBIE *ALEXI*.
"SEEMED HE STILL LOVED HER--EVEN GAVE HIS LIFE HELPIN' HER ESCAPE DURIN' THAT MISSION.
"ANY LAST THOUGHTS SHE HAD OF GOIN' COMMIE AGAIN, DIED WITH ALEXI.
"EVERYBODY WUZ HAPPY TA KNOW THAT.
"SHE KEPT DOIN' TOP-NOTCH STUFF FER US, AN' THEN OUTTA A CLEAR BLUE SKY SAID SHE WANTED OUT OF THE SPY BIZ.
"SHE WUZ PACKIN' IT IN...
"...AN' NOT JUST WITH US.
"SHE ALSO KISSED OFF HAWKEYE--WHO, BY THAT TIME, HAD A NEW IDENTITY, AS 'GOLIATH' OR SOMETHIN.'
"NOW, STRICTLY ON HER OWN, SHE DECIDED TA LIVE THE JET-SET LIFE 'A RILEY AN' PUT EVERYTHIN' IN HER PAST BEHIND HER.
"THE BLACK WIDOW WAS NOW JUST NATASHA ROMANOFF--GLAMOR-PANTS.


" BUT JET-SETTIN' DIDN'T SIT TOO WELL WITH HER FER LONG. AFTER AWHILE, SHE GOT THE ITCH TA GO 'PUBLIC' AGAIN-- SO TA SPEAK.
"SHE DESIGNED A WHOLE DIFFERENT WIDOW'S OUTFIT WITH NEW GADGETS AN' TRICKS.
"THEN--JUST TA SEE IF SHE STILL HAD HER TOUCH, I GUESS--SHE TOOK ON ***SPIDER-MAN*** AN' DIDN'T DO BAD AT ALL.
" 'COURSE, SHE WUZ WORKIN' ON HER OWN, THEN, AN' HADN'T BEEN IN TOUCH WITH ***SHIELD*** IN MONTHS.
"A SHORT TIME LATER, SHE CROSSED PATHS WITH OL' HORNHEAD--DAREDEVIL. FER AWHILE, YA DIDN'T SEE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER, AN' PEOPLE STARTED REALIZIN' THERE WUZ A LOT MORE TA THEIR PARLAY THAN CRIME-FIGHTIN'.


"BUT THAT DIDN'T LAST. THE WIDOW IS ONE INDEPENDENT LADY, AN' FROM WHAT I KNOW ABOUT D.D., HE AIN'T NO SHRINKIN' VIOLET EITHER.
"SO THEY STARTED HAVIN' PROBLEMS--AN' THEN FIGHTS. THEY TRIED TA MAKE IT WORK...
"... BUT IN THE END, THEY HADDA CALL IT QUITS. THERE WUZ NO OTHER WAY.
"SO THEY SEPARATED. SHE WENT TO L.A....
"... AN' TA HELP FERGIT THE HURT, SHE FORMED A NEW SUPER-GROUP--*THE CHAMPIONS*. THEY WEREN'T AROUND FER LONG... BUT LONG ENOUGH FER THE WIDOW TA GIT TA KNOW MR. MUSCLES, HISSELF...
"... HERCULES."
BUT THAT WUZ A QUICK FLING AN' THEN SHE DROPPED HIM AN' CAME BACK TA ***SHIELD***. SO, YA SEE, GENTS, MS. ROMANOFF'S HAD HER SHARE'A HEARTBREAKS, AN' I DON'T WANNA ADD TO 'EM WITH THIS ASSIGN--
FURY!


WHO?!
THE BLACK WIDOW-- AS IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW.
YOU SENT A SQUAD OF *SHIELD* GOONS OVER TO MY PENTHOUSE TO HARASS ME, THE ONE I QUESTIONED WOULDN'T TELL ME WHY. SO, *YOU* TELL ME.
HONEST, WIDOW, I DIDN'T GIVE NO ORDER TA--
BUT *I* DID, NICK. THAT LITTLE TEST I SPOKE OF EARLIER, TO DEMONSTRATE MS. ROMANOFF'S FITNESS TO HANDLE THIS *MISSION* OR ANY OTHER.
DING BLAST IT, SAM! I *KNOW* SHE'S THE BEST. THE POINT IS, SHE'S GOT A PERSONAL STAKE IN THIS AFFAIR, SO I DON'T WANT HER BEIN' ANY PART OF IT.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, FURY? WHAT MISSION? WHAT "PERSONAL STAKE." WHAT'S GOING ON?
SHOW HER THE PHOTOGRAPH, NICK.
SAM, I *DON'T* WANNA INVOLVE HER.
SHOW HER THE PHOTOGRAPH!
AWRIGHT.
REMEMBER, NATASHA, THIS WASN'T *MY* IDEA. ANYWAY, WE THINK THE MAN IN THIS PHOTO MAY HAVE BEEN KIDNAPPED OR WORSE--DEFECTED TO THE SOVIETS.
HIS NAME IS... IVAN PETROVICH.
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE IN:
"BACK IN THE U.S.S.R.!"

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PEREZ-LAYTON '78

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE BLACK WIDOW!

RALPH MACCHIO · **GEORGE PERÉZ** | **J.J. SINNABEL*** | **TOM ORZECHOWSKI**, letterer | **AL MILGROM** | **JIM SHOOTER**
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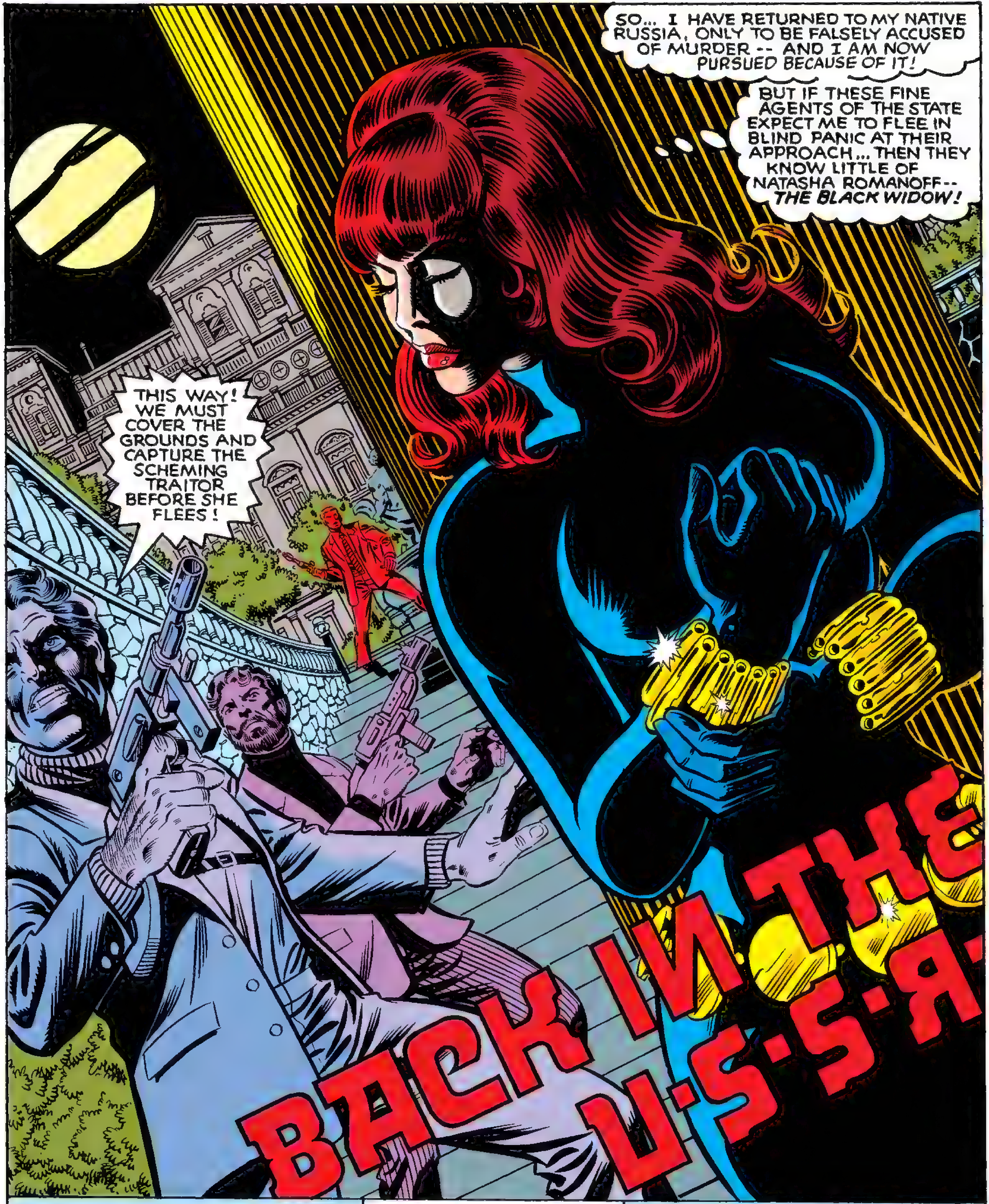
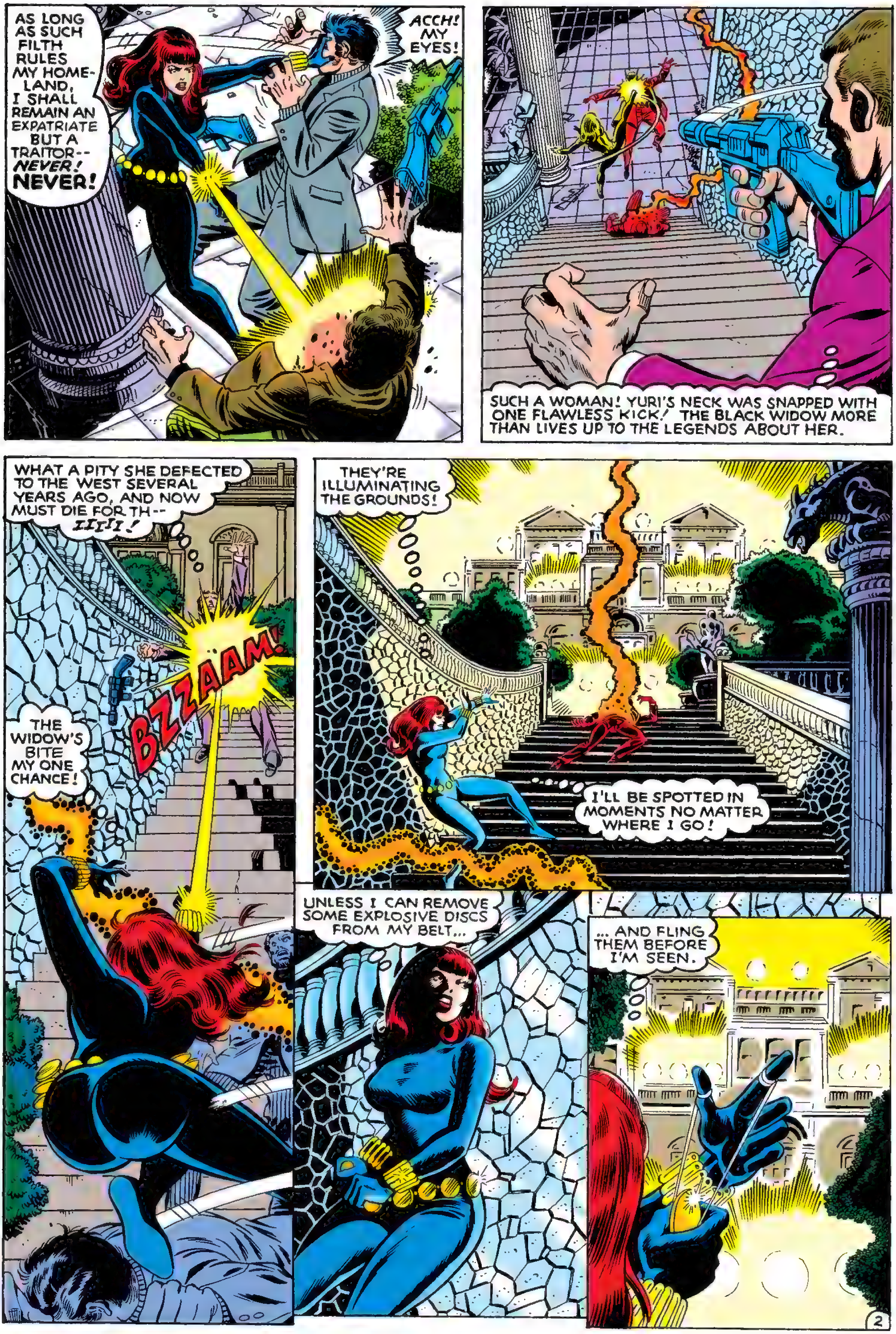
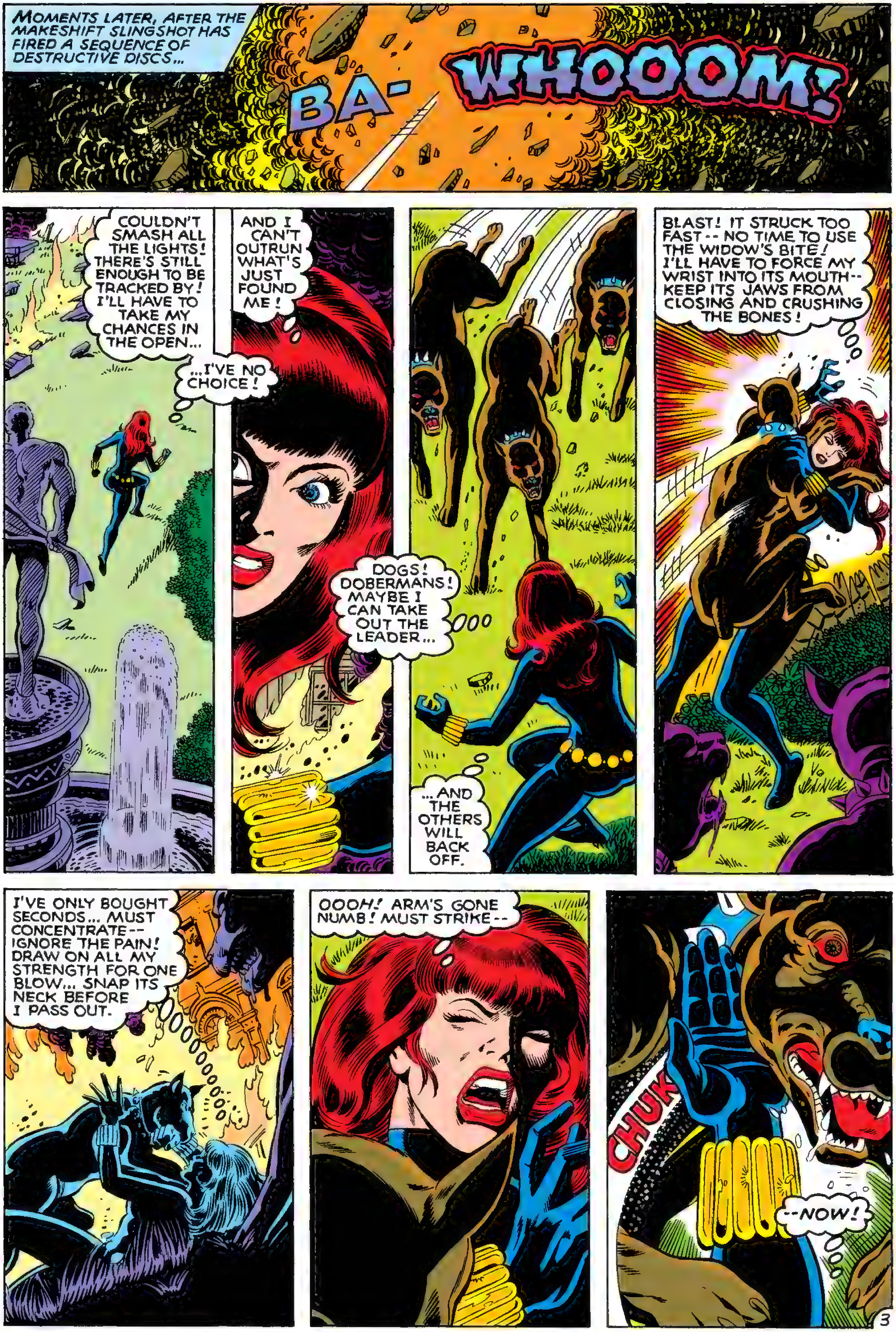
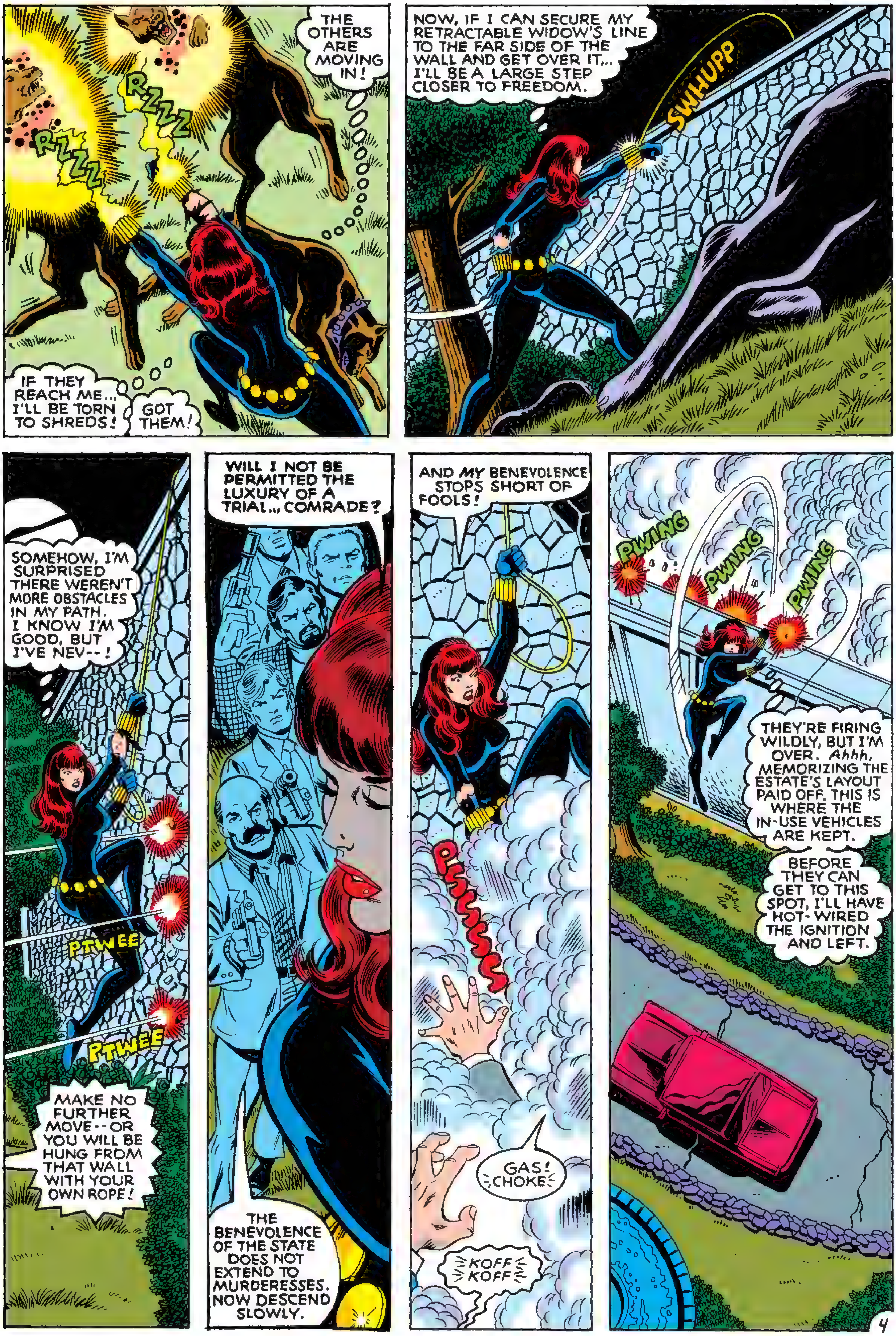

SO... I HAVE RETURNED TO MY NATIVE RUSSIA, ONLY TO BE FALSELY ACCUSED OF MURDER -- AND I AM NOW PURSUED BECAUSE OF IT!
BUT IF THESE FINE AGENTS OF THE STATE EXPECT ME TO FLEE IN BLIND PANIC AT THEIR APPROACH... THEN THEY KNOW LITTLE OF NATASHA ROMANOFF-- *THE BLACK WIDOW!*
THIS WAY! WE MUST COVER THE GROUNDS AND CAPTURE THE SCHEMING TRAITOR BEFORE SHE FLEES!
BACK IN THE U.S.S.R.

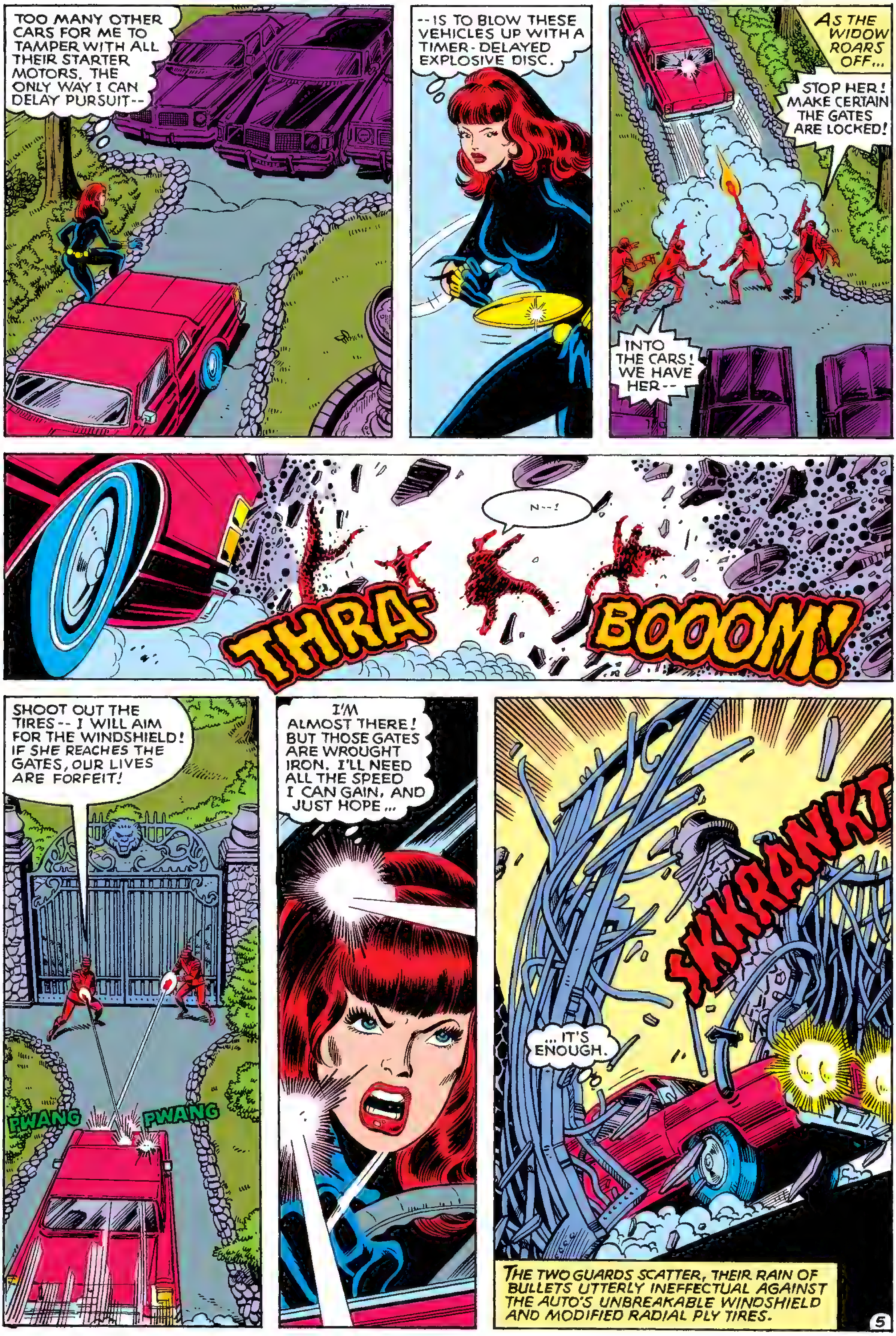
THIS STORY TAKES PLACE SOME TIME BEFORE THE WIDOW CHANGED HER COSTUME AND HAIRDO--AS SEEN IN RECENT ISSUES OF DAREDEVIL--EDITORI-AL.

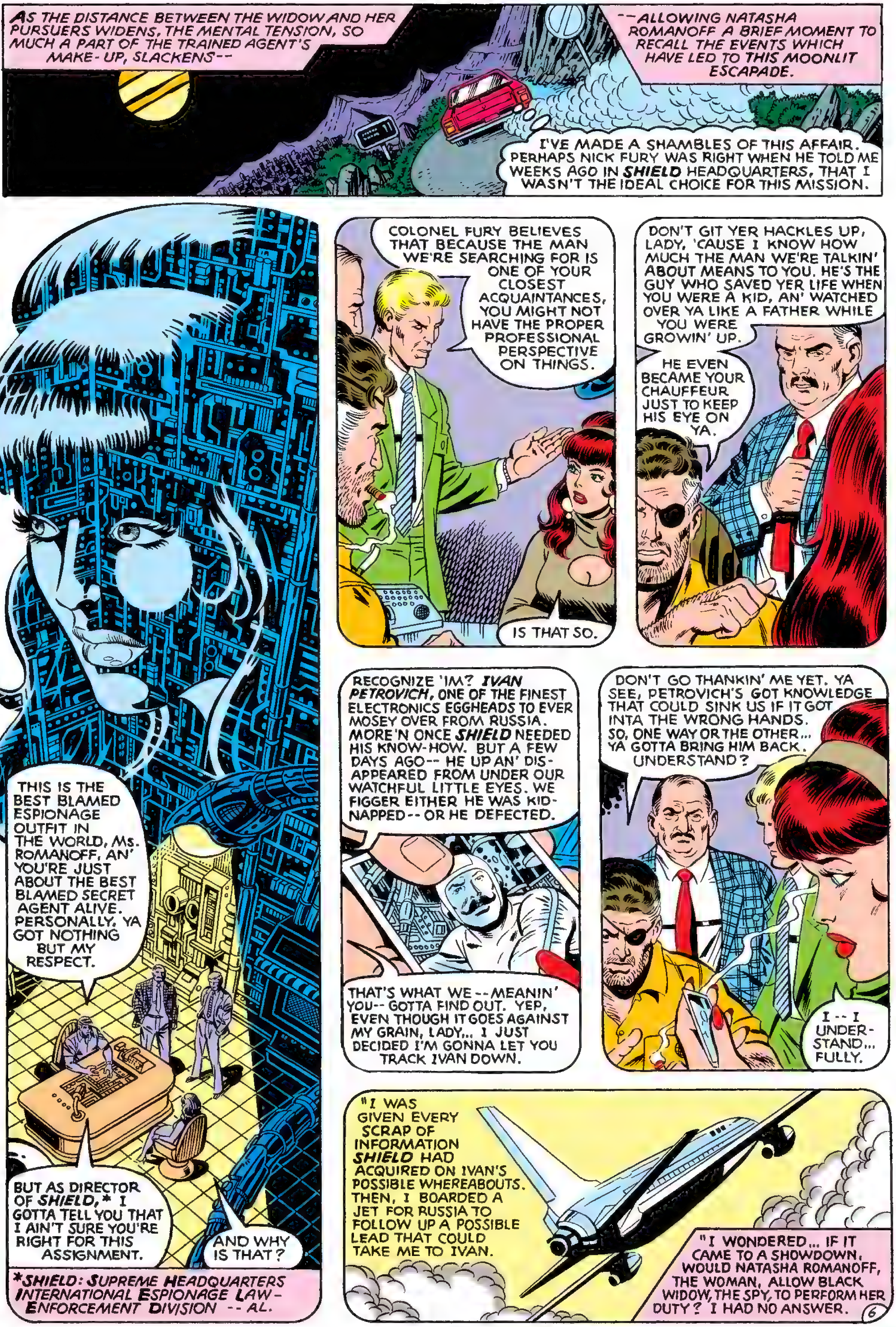
GEORGE'S EXTRAVAGANT PENCILS, WITH MORE DETAIL THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A PEN AT, WERE TOO MUCH FOR ANY ONE **MORTAL INKER. THUS THE EMBELLISHING DUO OF **JOE SINNOTT** AND **JACK ABEL** SHARED THE TASK, HENCE THE NAME J.J. SINNABEL.*

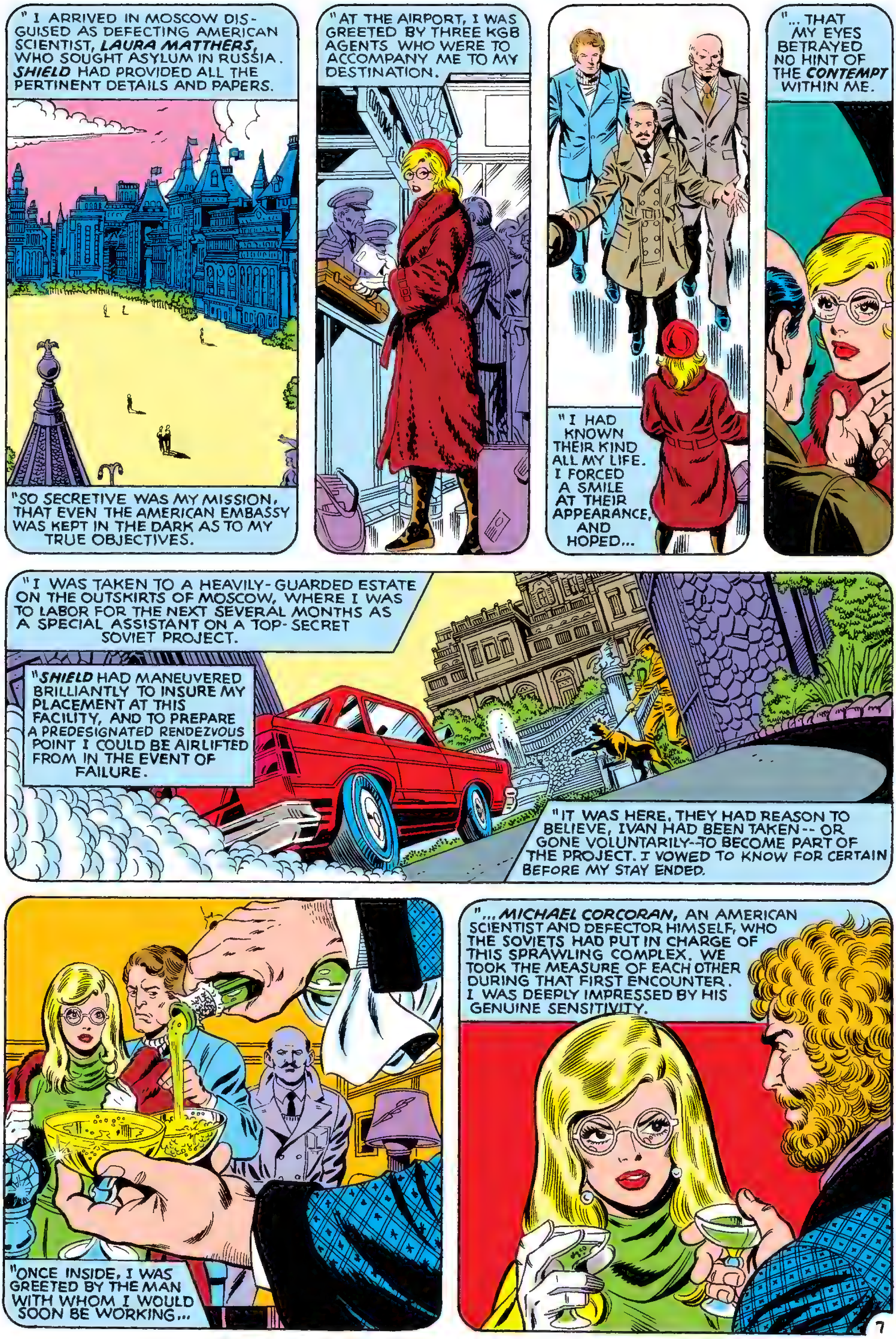

AS LONG AS SUCH FILTH RULES MY HOMELAND, I SHALL REMAIN AN EXPATRIATE BUT A TRAITOR-- *NEVER!* **NEVER!**
ACCH! MY EYES!
SUCH A WOMAN! YURI'S NECK WAS SNAPPED WITH ONE FLAWLESS KICK! THE BLACK WIDOW MORE THAN LIVES UP TO THE LEGENDS ABOUT HER.
WHAT A PITY SHE DEFECTED TO THE WEST SEVERAL YEARS AGO, AND NOW MUST DIE FOR TH-- IIIII!
BZZAAM!
THE WIDOW'S BITE MY ONE CHANCE!
THEY'RE ILLUMINATING THE GROUNDS!
I'LL BE SPOTTED IN MOMENTS NO MATTER WHERE I GO!
UNLESS I CAN REMOVE SOME EXPLOSIVE DISCS FROM MY BELT...
... AND FLING THEM BEFORE I'M SEEN.

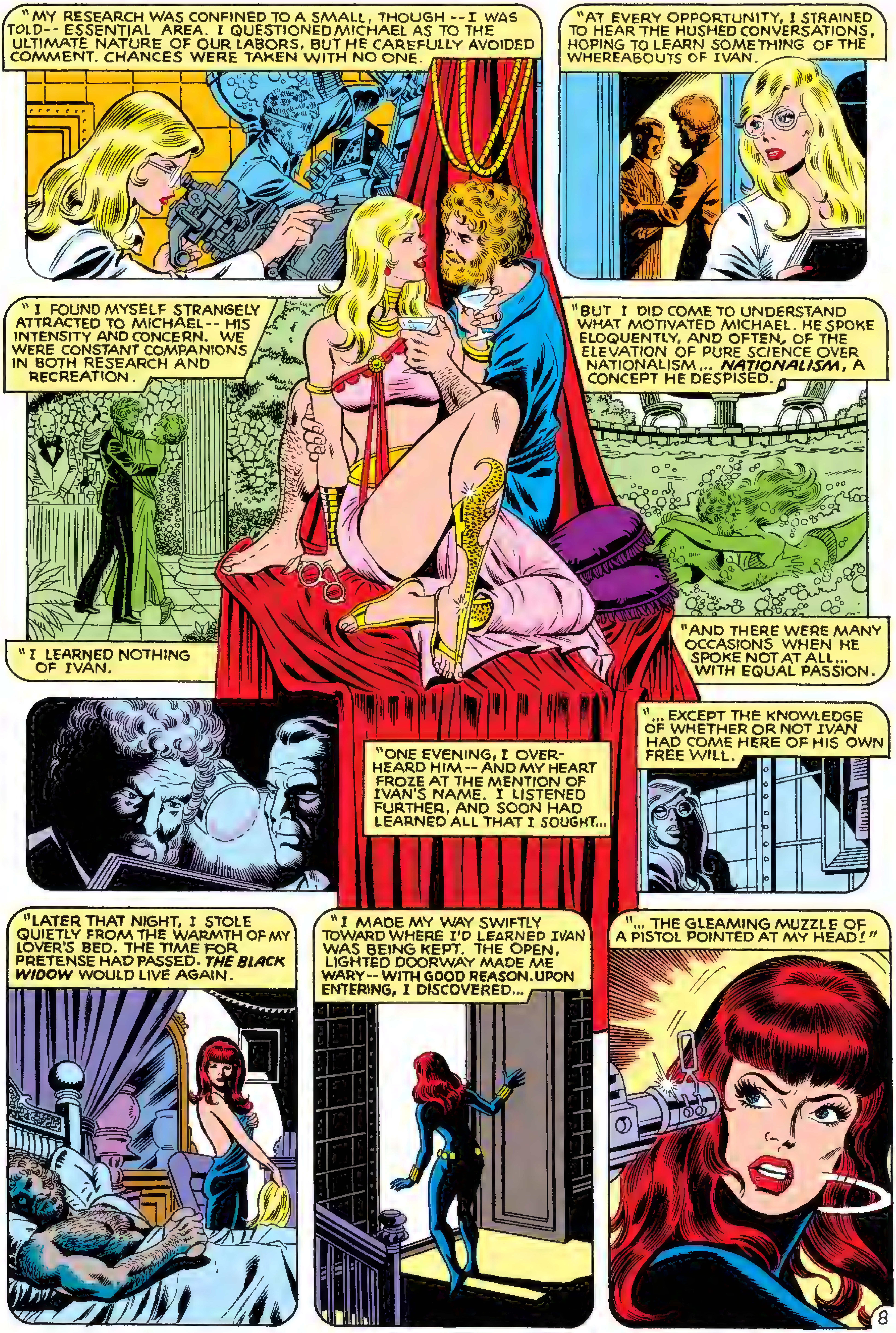

MOMENTS LATER, AFTER THE MAKESHIFT SLINGSHOT HAS FIRED A SEQUENCE OF DESTRUCTIVE DISCS...
BA-WHOOOOM!
COULDN'T SMASH ALL THE LIGHTS! THERE'S STILL ENOUGH TO BE TRACKED BY! I'LL HAVE TO TAKE MY CHANCES IN THE OPEN...
...I'VE NO CHOICE!
AND I CAN'T OUTRUN WHAT'S JUST FOUND ME!
DOGS! DOBERMANS! MAYBE I CAN TAKE OUT THE LEADER...
...AND THE OTHERS WILL BACK OFF.
BLAST! IT STRUCK TOO FAST-- NO TIME TO USE THE WIDOW'S BITE! I'LL HAVE TO FORCE MY WRIST INTO ITS MOUTH-- KEEP ITS JAWS FROM CLOSING AND CRUSHING THE BONES!
I'VE ONLY BOUGHT SECONDS... MUST CONCENTRATE-- IGNORE THE PAIN! DRAW ON ALL MY STRENGTH FOR ONE BLOW... SNAP ITS NECK BEFORE I PASS OUT.
OOOH! ARM'S GONE NUMB! MUST STRIKE--
CHUK
--NOW!

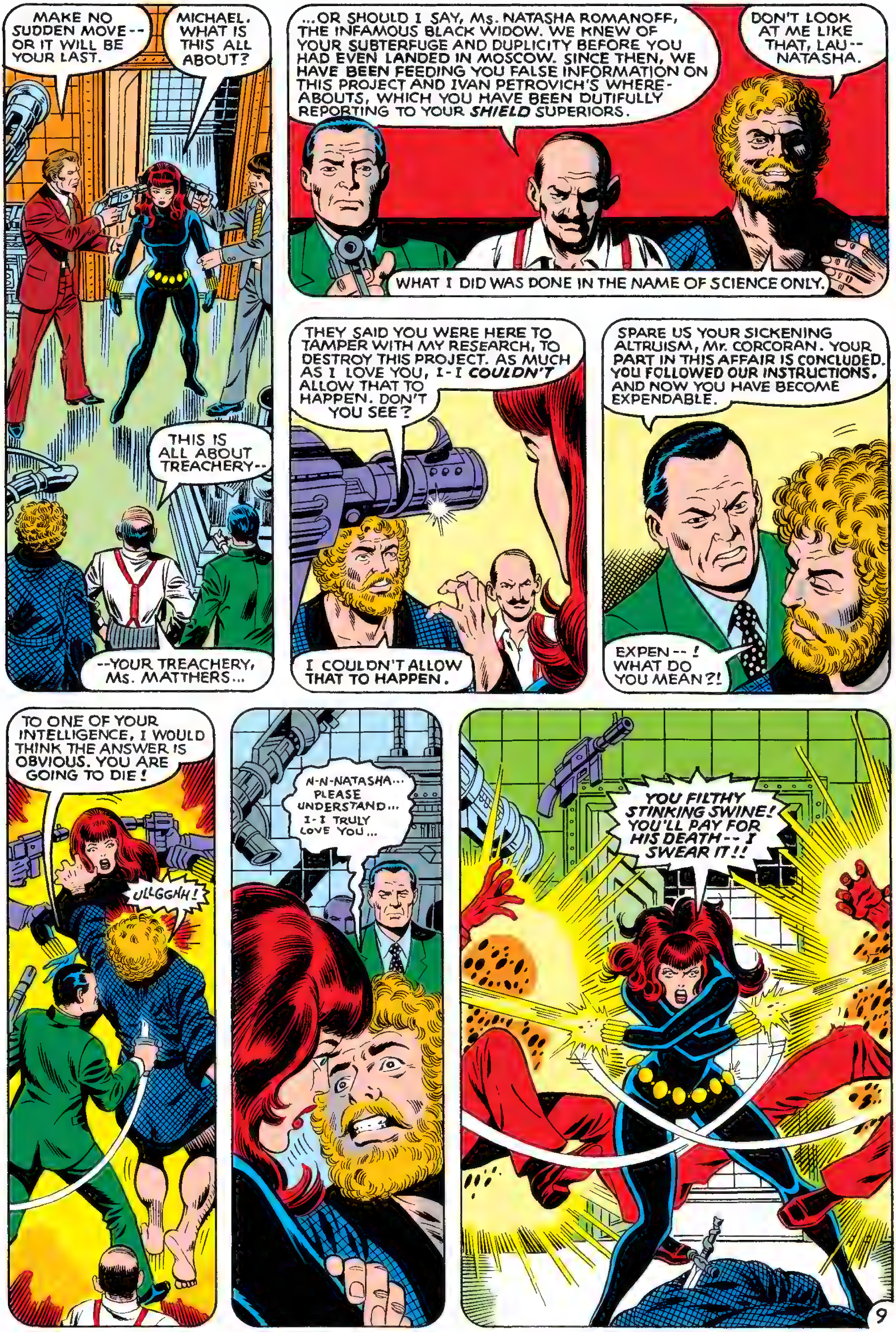

THE OTHERS ARE MOVING IN!
RZZZ
RZZZ
IF THEY REACH ME... I'LL BE TORN TO SHREDS!
GOT THEM!
NOW, IF I CAN SECURE MY RETRACTABLE WIDOW'S LINE TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE WALL AND GET OVER IT... I'LL BE A LARGE STEP CLOSER TO FREEDOM.
SWHUPP
SOMEHOW, I'M SURPRISED THERE WEREN'T MORE OBSTACLES IN MY PATH. I KNOW I'M GOOD, BUT I'VE NEV--!
PTWEE
PTWEE
MAKE NO FURTHER MOVE--OR YOU WILL BE HUNG FROM THAT WALL WITH YOUR OWN ROPE!
WILL I NOT BE PERMITTED THE LUXURY OF A TRIAL... COMRADE?
THE BENEVOLENCE OF THE STATE DOES NOT EXTEND TO MURDERESSES. NOW DESCEND SLOWLY.
AND MY BENEVOLENCE STOPS SHORT OF FOOLS!
PSSSSS
GAS! CHOKE
KOFF KOFF
PWING
PWING
PWING
THEY'RE FIRING WILDLY, BUT I'M OVER. Ahhh, MEMORIZING THE ESTATE'S LAYOUT PAID OFF. THIS IS WHERE THE IN-USE VEHICLES ARE KEPT.
BEFORE THEY CAN GET TO THIS SPOT, I'LL HAVE HOT-WIRED THE IGNITION AND LEFT.

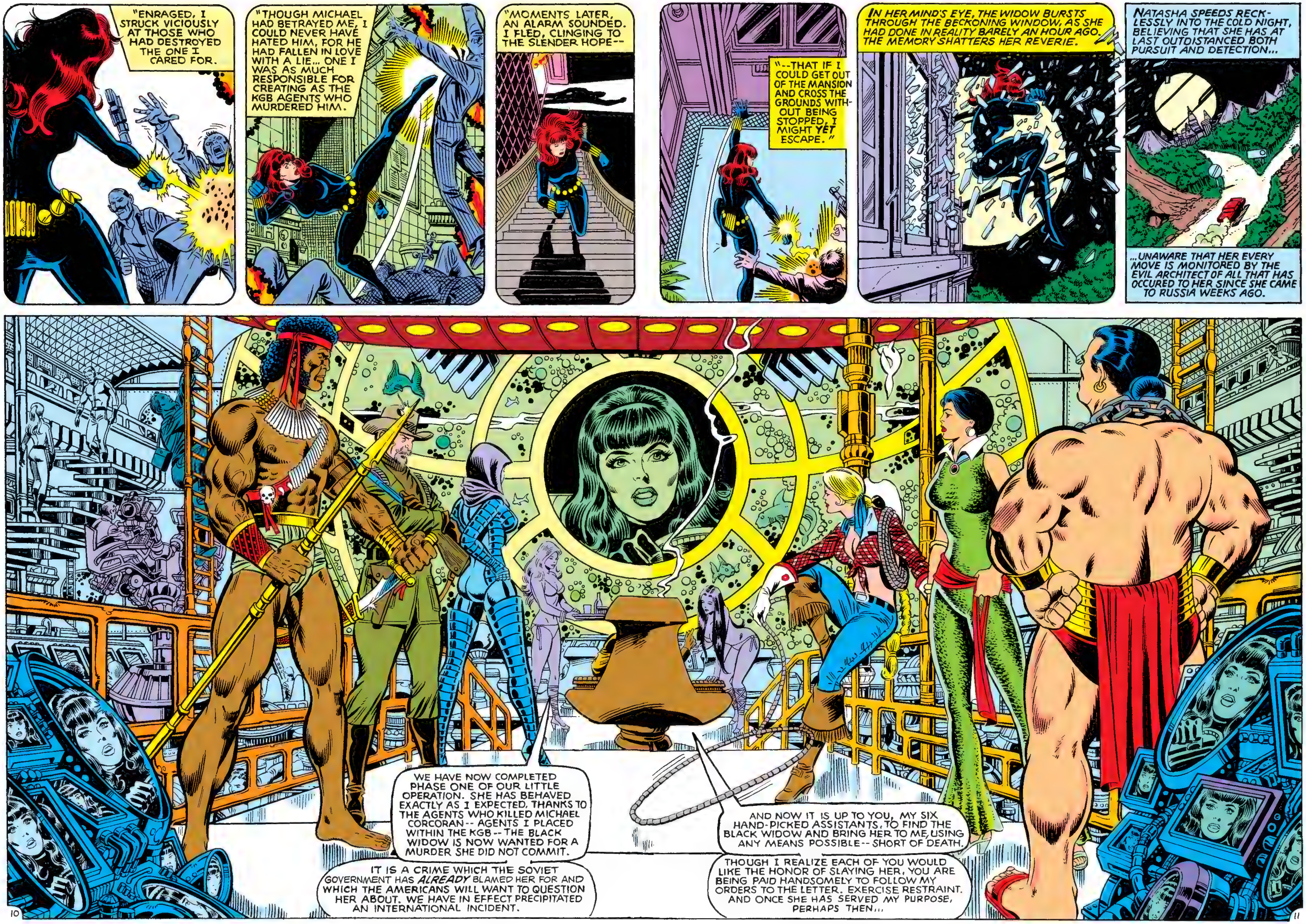

TOO MANY OTHER CARS FOR ME TO TAMPER WITH ALL THEIR STARTER MOTORS. THE ONLY WAY I CAN DELAY PURSUIT--
--IS TO BLOW THESE VEHICLES UP WITH A TIMER-DELAYED EXPLOSIVE DISC.
AS THE WIDOW ROARS OFF...
STOP HER! MAKE CERTAIN THE GATES ARE LOCKED!
INTO THE CARS! WE HAVE HER--
N--!
THRA-BOOOM!
SHOOT OUT THE TIRES-- I WILL AIM FOR THE WINDSHIELD! IF SHE REACHES THE GATES, OUR LIVES ARE FORFEIT!
PWANG
PWANG
I'M ALMOST THERE! BUT THOSE GATES ARE WROUGHT IRON. I'LL NEED ALL THE SPEED I CAN GAIN, AND JUST HOPE...
...IT'S ENOUGH.
SKKRANKT
THE TWO GUARDS SCATTER, THEIR RAIN OF BULLETS UTTERLY INEFFECTUAL AGAINST THE AUTO'S UNBREAKABLE WINDSHIELD AND MODIFIED RADIAL PLY TIRES.

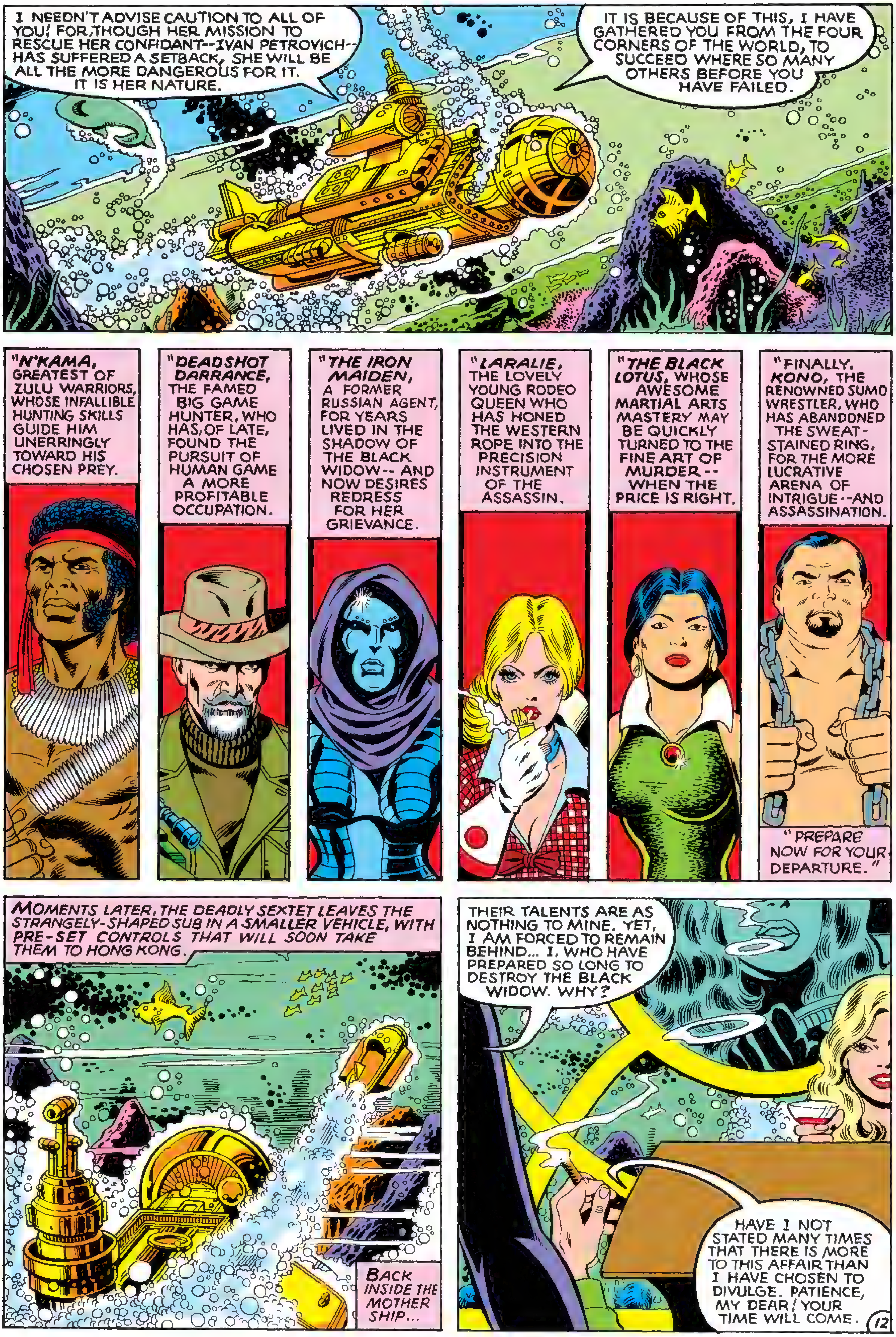

AS THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE WIDOW AND HER PURSUERS WIDENS, THE MENTAL TENSION, SO MUCH A PART OF THE TRAINED AGENT'S MAKE-UP, SLACKENS--
--ALLOWING NATASHA ROMANOFF A BRIEF MOMENT TO RECALL THE EVENTS WHICH HAVE LED TO THIS MOONLIT ESCAPADE.
I'VE MADE A SHAMBLES OF THIS AFFAIR. PERHAPS NICK FURY WAS RIGHT WHEN HE TOLD ME WEEKS AGO IN SHIELD HEADQUARTERS, THAT I WASN'T THE IDEAL CHOICE FOR THIS MISSION.
THIS IS THE BEST BLAMED ESPIONAGE OUTFIT IN THE WORLD, Ms. ROMANOFF, AN' YOU'RE JUST ABOUT THE BEST BLAMED SECRET AGENT ALIVE. PERSONALLY, YA GOT NOTHING BUT MY RESPECT.
BUT AS DIRECTOR OF SHIELD,* I GOTTA TELL YOU THAT I AIN'T SURE YOU'RE RIGHT FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT.
AND WHY IS THAT?
*SHIELD: SUPREME HEADQUARTERS INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE LAW-ENFORCEMENT DIVISION --AL.
COLONEL FURY BELIEVES THAT BECAUSE THE MAN WE'RE SEARCHING FOR IS ONE OF YOUR CLOSEST ACQUAINTANCES, YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE THE PROPER PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THINGS.
IS THAT SO.
DON'T GIT YER HACKLES UP, LADY, 'CAUSE I KNOW HOW MUCH THE MAN WE'RE TALKIN' ABOUT MEANS TO YOU. HE'S THE GUY WHO SAVED YER LIFE WHEN YOU WERE A KID, AN' WATCHED OVER YA LIKE A FATHER WHILE YOU WERE GROWIN' UP.
HE EVEN BECAME YOUR CHAUFFEUR JUST TO KEEP HIS EYE ON YA.
RECOGNIZE 'IM? IVAN PETROVICH, ONE OF THE FINEST ELECTRONICS EGGHEADS TO EVER MOSEY OVER FROM RUSSIA. MORE'N ONCE SHIELD NEEDED HIS KNOW-HOW. BUT A FEW DAYS AGO-- HE UP AN' DISAPPEARED FROM UNDER OUR WATCHFUL LITTLE EYES. WE FIGGER EITHER HE WAS KIDNAPPED-- OR HE DEFECTED.
THAT'S WHAT WE --MEANIN' YOU-- GOTTA FIND OUT. YEP, EVEN THOUGH IT GOES AGAINST MY GRAIN, LADY... I JUST DECIDED I'M GONNA LET YOU TRACK IVAN DOWN.
DON'T GO THANKIN' ME YET. YA SEE, PETROVICH'S GOT KNOWLEDGE THAT COULD SINK US IF IT GOT INTA THE WRONG HANDS. SO, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER... YA GOTTA BRING HIM BACK. UNDERSTAND?
I -- I UNDERSTAND... FULLY.
"I WAS GIVEN EVERY SCRAP OF INFORMATION SHIELD HAD ACQUIRED ON IVAN'S POSSIBLE WHEREABOUTS. THEN, I BOARDED A JET FOR RUSSIA TO FOLLOW UP A POSSIBLE LEAD THAT COULD TAKE ME TO IVAN.
"I WONDERED... IF IT CAME TO A SHOWDOWN, WOULD NATASHA ROMANOFF, THE WOMAN, ALLOW BLACK WIDOW, THE SPY, TO PERFORM HER DUTY? I HAD NO ANSWER.

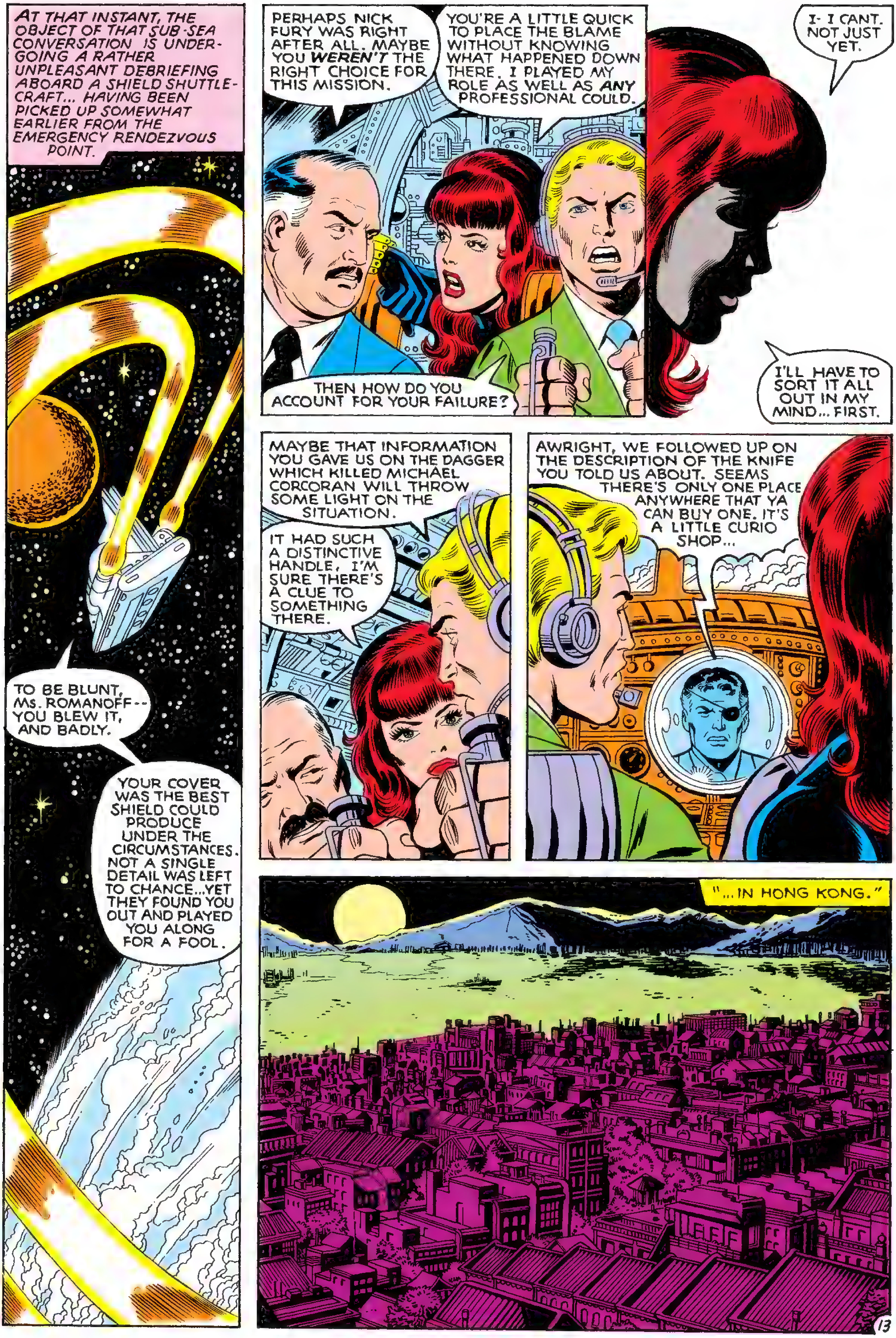

"I ARRIVED IN MOSCOW DISGUISED AS DEFECTING AMERICAN SCIENTIST, ***LAURA MATTHERS***, WHO SOUGHT ASYLUM IN RUSSIA. ***SHIELD*** HAD PROVIDED ALL THE PERTINENT DETAILS AND PAPERS.
"SO SECRETIVE WAS MY MISSION, THAT EVEN THE AMERICAN EMBASSY WAS KEPT IN THE DARK AS TO MY TRUE OBJECTIVES.
"AT THE AIRPORT, I WAS GREETED BY THREE KGB AGENTS WHO WERE TO ACCOMPANY ME TO MY DESTINATION.
CUSTOMS
"I HAD KNOWN THEIR KIND ALL MY LIFE. I FORCED A SMILE AT THEIR APPEARANCE, AND HOPED...
"...THAT MY EYES BETRAYED NO HINT OF THE ***CONTEMPT*** WITHIN ME.
"I WAS TAKEN TO A HEAVILY-GUARDED ESTATE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF MOSCOW, WHERE I WAS TO LABOR FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS AS A SPECIAL ASSISTANT ON A TOP-SECRET SOVIET PROJECT.
"***SHIELD*** HAD MANEUVERED BRILLIANTLY TO INSURE MY PLACEMENT AT THIS FACILITY, AND TO PREPARE A PREDESIGNATED RENDEZVOUS POINT I COULD BE AIRLIFTED FROM IN THE EVENT OF FAILURE.
"IT WAS HERE, THEY HAD REASON TO BELIEVE, IVAN HAD BEEN TAKEN-- OR GONE VOLUNTARILY--TO BECOME PART OF THE PROJECT. I VOWED TO KNOW FOR CERTAIN BEFORE MY STAY ENDED.
"ONCE INSIDE, I WAS GREETED BY THE MAN WITH WHOM I WOULD SOON BE WORKING...
"...***MICHAEL CORCORAN***, AN AMERICAN SCIENTIST AND DEFECTOR HIMSELF, WHO THE SOVIETS HAD PUT IN CHARGE OF THIS SPRAWLING COMPLEX. WE TOOK THE MEASURE OF EACH OTHER DURING THAT FIRST ENCOUNTER. I WAS DEEPLY IMPRESSED BY HIS GENUINE SENSITIVITY.

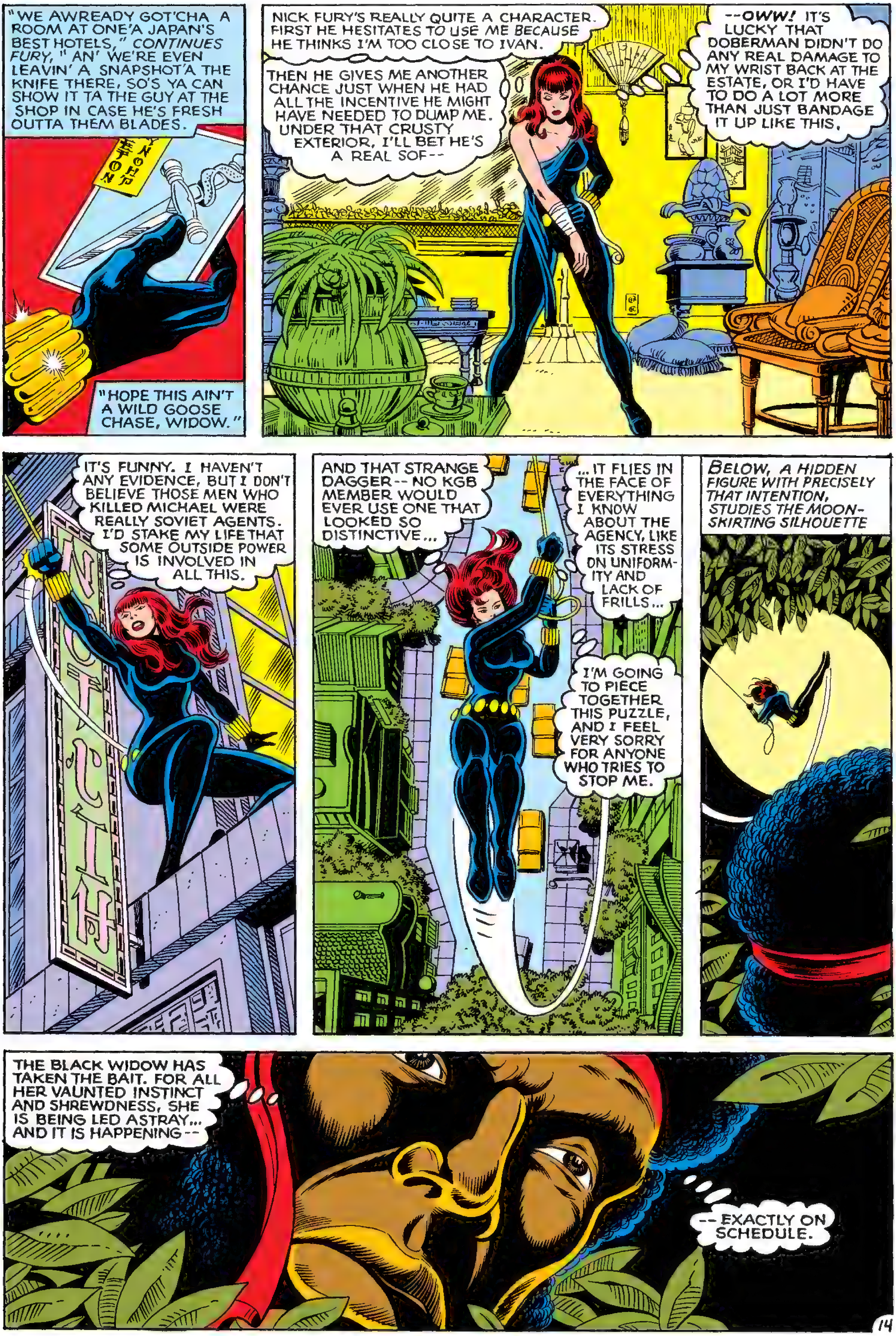

"MY RESEARCH WAS CONFINED TO A SMALL, THOUGH -- I WAS TOLD -- ESSENTIAL AREA. I QUESTIONED MICHAEL AS TO THE ULTIMATE NATURE OF OUR LABORS, BUT HE CAREFULLY AVOIDED COMMENT. CHANCES WERE TAKEN WITH NO ONE.
"AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY, I STRAINED TO HEAR THE HUSHED CONVERSATIONS, HOPING TO LEARN SOMETHING OF THE WHEREABOUTS OF IVAN.
"I FOUND MYSELF STRANGELY ATTRACTED TO MICHAEL -- HIS INTENSITY AND CONCERN. WE WERE CONSTANT COMPANIONS IN BOTH RESEARCH AND RECREATION.
"I LEARNED NOTHING OF IVAN.
"BUT I DID COME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MOTIVATED MICHAEL. HE SPOKE ELOQUENTLY, AND OFTEN, OF THE ELEVATION OF PURE SCIENCE OVER NATIONALISM... *NATIONALISM*, A CONCEPT HE DESPISED.
"AND THERE WERE MANY OCCASIONS WHEN HE SPOKE NOT AT ALL... WITH EQUAL PASSION.
"... EXCEPT THE KNOWLEDGE OF WHETHER OR NOT IVAN HAD COME HERE OF HIS OWN FREE WILL.
"ONE EVENING, I OVERHEARD HIM -- AND MY HEART FROZE AT THE MENTION OF IVAN'S NAME. I LISTENED FURTHER, AND SOON HAD LEARNED ALL THAT I SOUGHT...
"LATER THAT NIGHT, I STOLE QUIETLY FROM THE WARMTH OF MY LOVER'S BED. THE TIME FOR PRETENSE HAD PASSED. *THE BLACK WIDOW* WOULD LIVE AGAIN.
"I MADE MY WAY SWIFTLY TOWARD WHERE I'D LEARNED IVAN WAS BEING KEPT. THE OPEN, LIGHTED DOORWAY MADE ME WARY -- WITH GOOD REASON. UPON ENTERING, I DISCOVERED...
"... THE GLEAMING MUZZLE OF A PISTOL POINTED AT MY HEAD!"

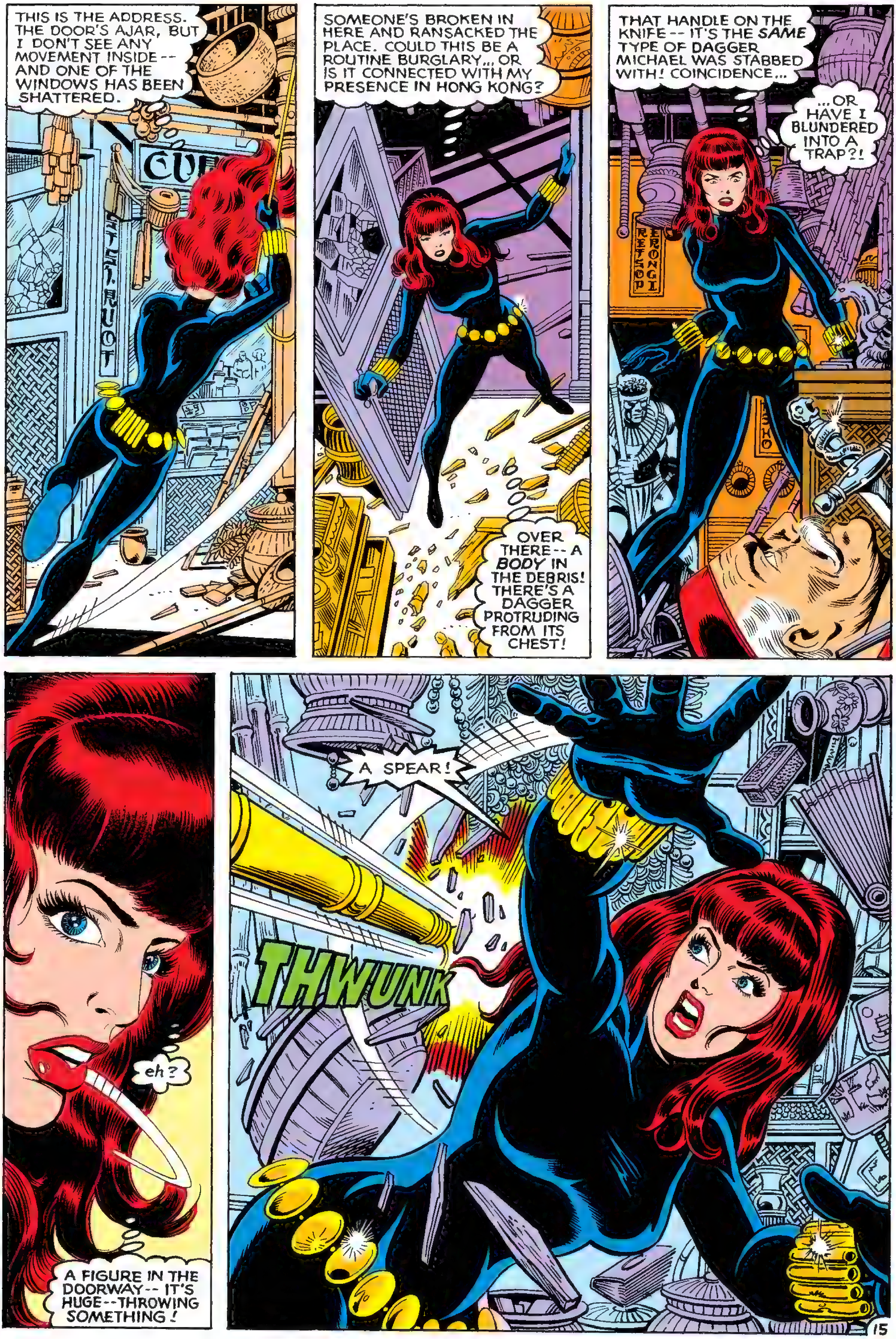

MAKE NO SUDDEN MOVE -- OR IT WILL BE YOUR LAST.
MICHAEL. WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT?
THIS IS ALL ABOUT TREACHERY--
--YOUR TREACHERY, Ms. MATTHERS...
...OR SHOULD I SAY, Ms. NATASHA ROMANOFF, THE INFAMOUS BLACK WIDOW. WE KNEW OF YOUR SUBTERFUGE AND DUPLICITY BEFORE YOU HAD EVEN LANDED IN MOSCOW. SINCE THEN, WE HAVE BEEN FEEDING YOU FALSE INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT AND IVAN PETROVICH'S WHEREABOUTS, WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN DUTIFULLY REPORTING TO YOUR *SHIELD* SUPERIORS.
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT, LAU-- NATASHA.
WHAT I DID WAS DONE IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE ONLY.
THEY SAID YOU WERE HERE TO TAMPER WITH MY RESEARCH, TO DESTROY THIS PROJECT. AS MUCH AS I LOVE YOU, I-I *COULDN'T* ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN. DON'T YOU SEE?
I COULDN'T ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN.
SPARE US YOUR SICKENING ALTRUISM, Mr. CORCORAN. YOUR PART IN THIS AFFAIR IS CONCLUDED. YOU FOLLOWED OUR INSTRUCTIONS. AND NOW YOU HAVE BECOME EXPENDABLE.
EXPEN-- ! WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!
TO ONE OF YOUR INTELLIGENCE, I WOULD THINK THE ANSWER IS OBVIOUS. YOU ARE GOING TO DIE!
ULLGGHH!
N-N-NATASHA... PLEASE UNDERSTAND... I-I TRULY LOVE YOU...
YOU FILTHY STINKING SWINE! YOU'LL PAY FOR HIS DEATH-- I SWEAR IT!!

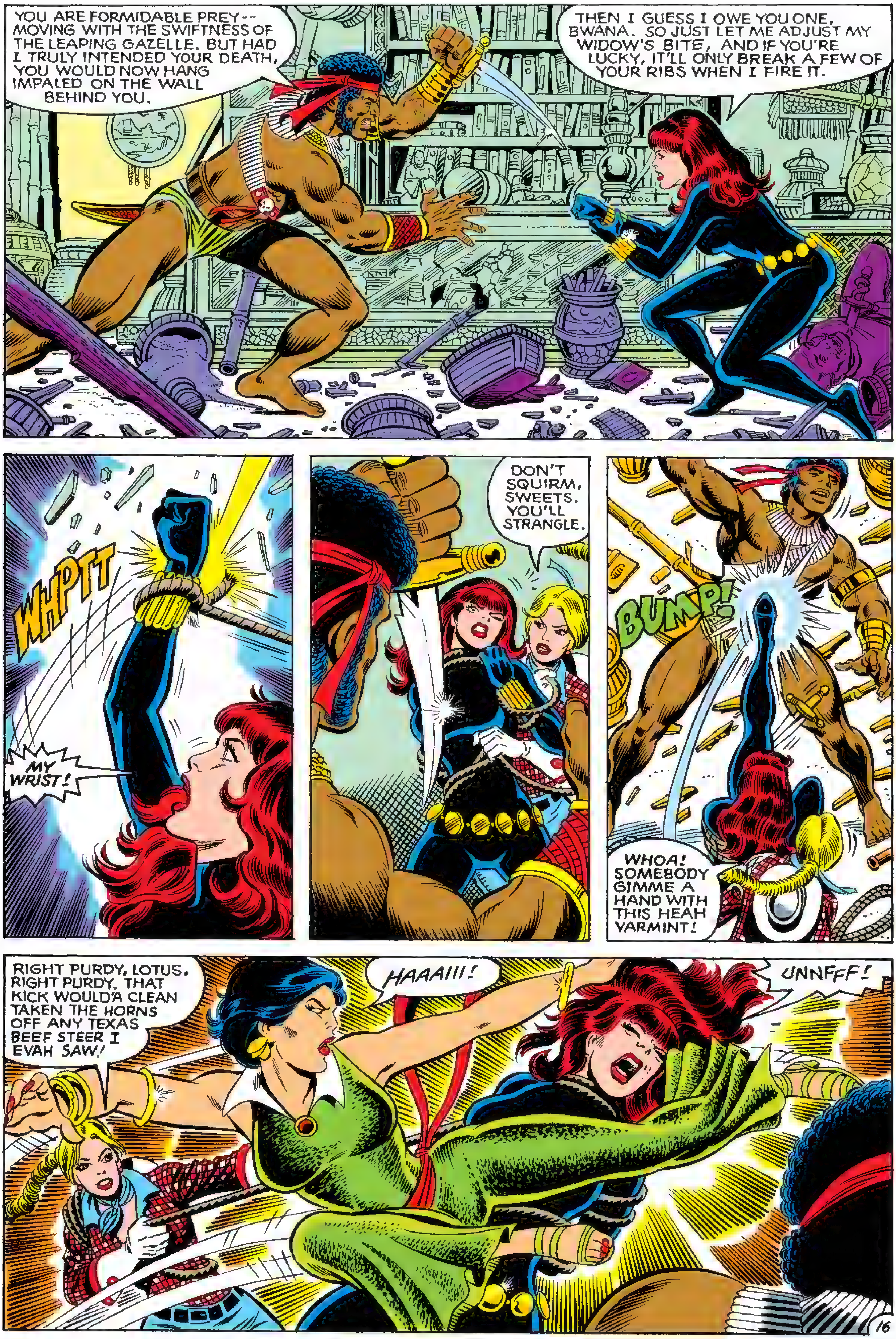

"ENRAGED, I STRUCK VICIOUSLY AT THOSE WHO HAD DESTROYED THE ONE I CARED FOR.
"THOUGH MICHAEL HAD BETRAYED ME, I COULD NEVER HAVE HATED HIM, FOR HE HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH A LIE... ONE I WAS AS MUCH RESPONSIBLE FOR CREATING AS THE KGB AGENTS WHO MURDERED HIM.
"MOMENTS LATER, AN ALARM SOUNDED. I FLED, CLINGING TO THE SLENDER HOPE--
"--THAT IF I COULD GET OUT OF THE MANSION AND CROSS THE GROUNDS WITHOUT BEING STOPPED, I MIGHT *YET* ESCAPE."
IN HER MIND'S EYE, THE WIDOW BURSTS THROUGH THE BECKONING WINDOW, AS SHE HAD DONE IN REALITY BARELY AN HOUR AGO. THE MEMORY SHATTERS HER REVERIE.
NATASHA SPEEDS RECKLESSLY INTO THE COLD NIGHT, BELIEVING THAT SHE HAS AT LAST OUTDISTANCED BOTH PURSUIT AND DETECTION...
...UNAWARE THAT HER EVERY MOVE IS MONITORED BY THE EVIL ARCHITECT OF ALL THAT HAS OCCURED TO HER SINCE SHE CAME TO RUSSIA WEEKS AGO.
WE HAVE NOW COMPLETED PHASE ONE OF OUR LITTLE OPERATION. SHE HAS BEHAVED EXACTLY AS I EXPECTED. THANKS TO THE AGENTS WHO KILLED MICHAEL CORCORAN-- AGENTS I PLACED WITHIN THE KGB-- THE BLACK WIDOW IS NOW WANTED FOR A MURDER SHE DID NOT COMMIT.
IT IS A CRIME WHICH THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT HAS *ALREADY* BLAMED HER FOR AND WHICH THE AMERICANS WILL WANT TO QUESTION HER ABOUT. WE HAVE IN EFFECT PRECIPITATED AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT.
AND NOW IT IS UP TO YOU, MY SIX HAND-PICKED ASSISTANTS, TO FIND THE BLACK WIDOW AND BRING HER TO ME, USING ANY MEANS POSSIBLE-- SHORT OF DEATH.
THOUGH I REALIZE EACH OF YOU WOULD LIKE THE HONOR OF SLAYING HER, YOU ARE BEING PAID HANDSOMELY TO FOLLOW MY ORDERS TO THE LETTER. EXERCISE RESTRAINT. AND ONCE SHE HAS SERVED MY PURPOSE, PERHAPS THEN...

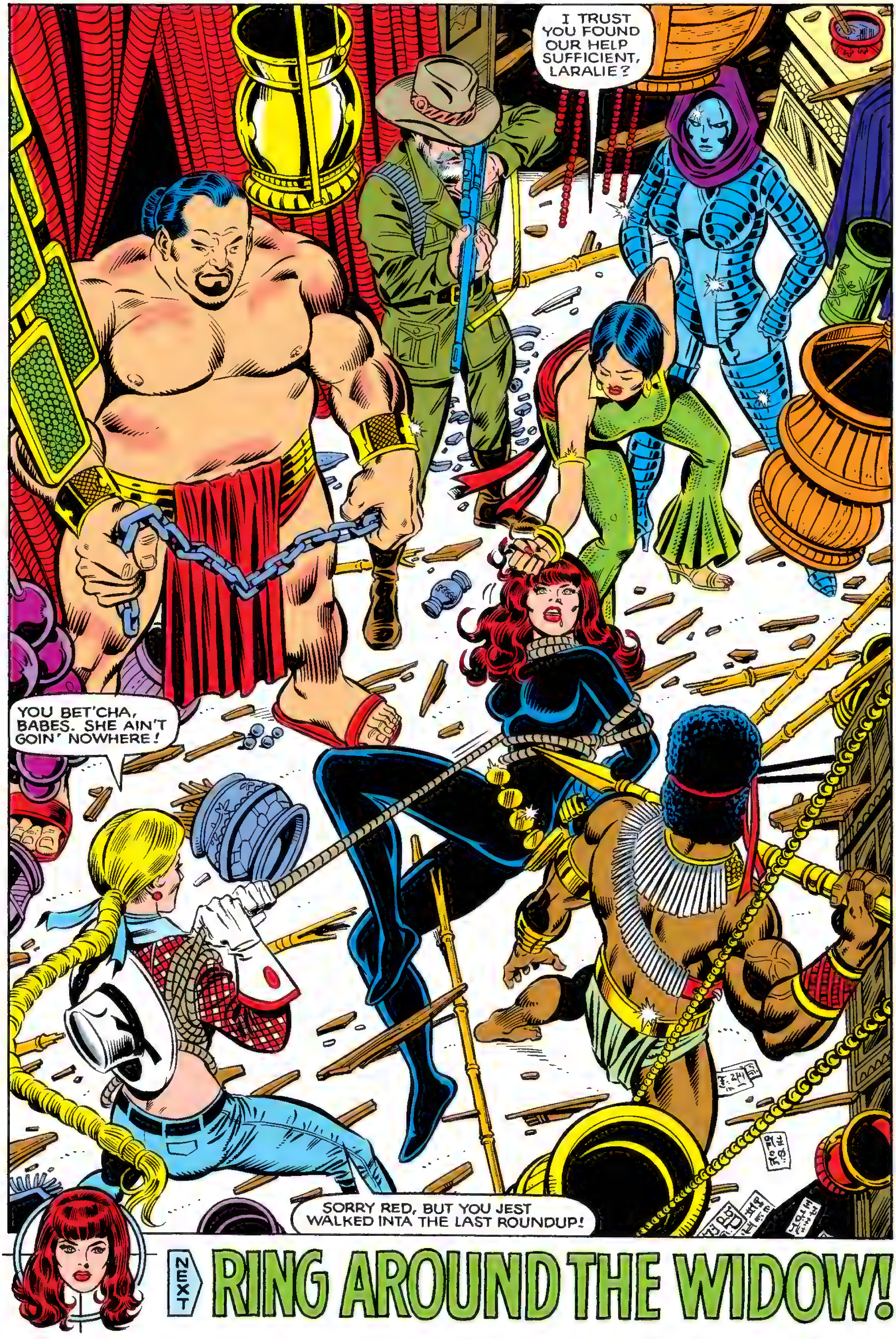

I NEEDN'T ADVISE CAUTION TO ALL OF YOU! FOR, THOUGH HER MISSION TO RESCUE HER CONFIDANT--IVAN PETROVICH--HAS SUFFERED A SETBACK, SHE WILL BE ALL THE MORE DANGEROUS FOR IT. IT IS HER NATURE.
IT IS BECAUSE OF THIS, I HAVE GATHERED YOU FROM THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD, TO SUCCEED WHERE SO MANY OTHERS BEFORE YOU HAVE FAILED.
"N'KAMA, GREATEST OF ZULU WARRIORS, WHOSE INFALLIBLE HUNTING SKILLS GUIDE HIM UNERRINGLY TOWARD HIS CHOSEN PREY.
"DEADSHOT DARRANCE, THE FAMED BIG GAME HUNTER, WHO HAS, OF LATE, FOUND THE PURSUIT OF HUMAN GAME A MORE PROFITABLE OCCUPATION.
"THE IRON MAIDEN, A FORMER RUSSIAN AGENT, FOR YEARS LIVED IN THE SHADOW OF THE BLACK WIDOW-- AND NOW DESIRES REDRESS FOR HER GRIEVANCE.
"LARALIE, THE LOVELY YOUNG RODEO QUEEN WHO HAS HONED THE WESTERN ROPE INTO THE PRECISION INSTRUMENT OF THE ASSASSIN.
"THE BLACK LOTUS, WHOSE AWESOME MARTIAL ARTS MASTERY MAY BE QUICKLY TURNED TO THE FINE ART OF MURDER -- WHEN THE PRICE IS RIGHT.
"FINALLY, KONO, THE RENOWNED SUMO WRESTLER, WHO HAS ABANDONED THE SWEAT-STAINED RING, FOR THE MORE LUCRATIVE ARENA OF INTRIGUE--AND ASSASSINATION.
"PREPARE NOW FOR YOUR DEPARTURE."
MOMENTS LATER, THE DEADLY SEXTET LEAVES THE STRANGELY-SHAPED SUB IN A SMALLER VEHICLE, WITH PRE-SET CONTROLS THAT WILL SOON TAKE THEM TO HONG KONG.
BACK INSIDE THE MOTHER SHIP...
THEIR TALENTS ARE AS NOTHING TO MINE. YET, I AM FORCED TO REMAIN BEHIND... I, WHO HAVE PREPARED SO LONG TO DESTROY THE BLACK WIDOW. WHY?
HAVE I NOT STATED MANY TIMES THAT THERE IS MORE TO THIS AFFAIR THAN I HAVE CHOSEN TO DIVULGE. PATIENCE, MY DEAR! YOUR TIME WILL COME.


AT THAT INSTANT, THE OBJECT OF THAT SUB-SEA CONVERSATION IS UNDERGOING A RATHER UNPLEASANT DEBRIEFING ABOARD A SHIELD SHUTTLECRAFT... HAVING BEEN PICKED UP SOMEWHAT EARLIER FROM THE EMERGENCY RENDEZVOUS POINT.
TO BE BLUNT, MS. ROMANOFF-- YOU BLEW IT, AND BADLY.
YOUR COVER WAS THE BEST SHIELD COULD PRODUCE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. NOT A SINGLE DETAIL WAS LEFT TO CHANCE...YET THEY FOUND YOU OUT AND PLAYED YOU ALONG FOR A FOOL.
PERHAPS NICK FURY WAS RIGHT AFTER ALL. MAYBE YOU **WEREN'T** THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR THIS MISSION.
YOU'RE A LITTLE QUICK TO PLACE THE BLAME WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT HAPPENED DOWN THERE. I PLAYED MY ROLE AS WELL AS **ANY** PROFESSIONAL COULD.
THEN HOW DO YOU ACCOUNT FOR YOUR FAILURE?
I- I CAN'T. NOT JUST YET.
I'LL HAVE TO SORT IT ALL OUT IN MY MIND... FIRST.
MAYBE THAT INFORMATION YOU GAVE US ON THE DAGGER WHICH KILLED MICHAEL CORCORAN WILL THROW SOME LIGHT ON THE SITUATION.
IT HAD SUCH A DISTINCTIVE HANDLE, I'M SURE THERE'S A CLUE TO SOMETHING THERE.
AWRIGHT, WE FOLLOWED UP ON THE DESCRIPTION OF THE KNIFE YOU TOLD US ABOUT. SEEMS THERE'S ONLY ONE PLACE ANYWHERE THAT YA CAN BUY ONE. IT'S A LITTLE CURIO SHOP...
"...IN HONG KONG."


"WE AWREADY GOT'CHA A ROOM AT ONE'A JAPAN'S BEST HOTELS," *CONTINUES FURY,* " AN' WE'RE EVEN LEAVIN' A SNAPSHOT'A THE KNIFE THERE, SO'S YA CAN SHOW IT TA THE GUY AT THE SHOP IN CASE HE'S FRESH OUTTA THEM BLADES.
"HOPE THIS AIN'T A WILD GOOSE CHASE, WIDOW."
NICK FURY'S REALLY QUITE A CHARACTER. FIRST HE HESITATES TO USE *ME* BECAUSE HE THINKS I'M TOO CLOSE TO IVAN.
THEN HE GIVES ME ANOTHER CHANCE JUST WHEN HE HAD ALL THE INCENTIVE HE MIGHT HAVE NEEDED TO DUMP ME. UNDER THAT CRUSTY EXTERIOR, I'LL BET HE'S A REAL SOF--
--*OWW!* IT'S LUCKY THAT DOBERMAN DIDN'T DO ANY REAL DAMAGE TO MY WRIST BACK AT THE ESTATE, OR I'D HAVE TO DO A LOT MORE THAN JUST BANDAGE IT UP LIKE THIS.
IT'S FUNNY. I HAVEN'T ANY EVIDENCE, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE THOSE MEN WHO KILLED MICHAEL WERE REALLY SOVIET AGENTS. I'D STAKE MY LIFE THAT SOME OUTSIDE POWER IS INVOLVED IN ALL THIS.
AND THAT STRANGE DAGGER -- NO KGB MEMBER WOULD EVER USE ONE THAT LOOKED SO DISTINCTIVE...
...IT FLIES IN THE FACE OF EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT THE AGENCY, LIKE ITS STRESS ON UNIFORMITY AND LACK OF FRILLS...
I'M GOING TO PIECE TOGETHER THIS PUZZLE, AND I FEEL VERY SORRY FOR ANYONE WHO TRIES TO STOP ME.
BELOW, A HIDDEN FIGURE WITH PRECISELY THAT INTENTION, STUDIES THE MOON-SKIRTING SILHOUETTE
THE BLACK WIDOW HAS TAKEN THE BAIT. FOR ALL HER VAUNTED INSTINCT AND SHREWDNESS, SHE IS BEING LED ASTRAY... AND IT IS HAPPENING --
-- EXACTLY ON SCHEDULE.


THIS IS THE ADDRESS. THE DOOR'S AJAR, BUT I DON'T SEE ANY MOVEMENT INSIDE-- AND ONE OF THE WINDOWS HAS BEEN SHATTERED.
SOMEONE'S BROKEN IN HERE AND RANSACKED THE PLACE. COULD THIS BE A ROUTINE BURGLARY... OR IS IT CONNECTED WITH MY PRESENCE IN HONG KONG?
OVER THERE-- A *BODY* IN THE DEBRIS! THERE'S A DAGGER PROTRUDING FROM ITS CHEST!
THAT HANDLE ON THE KNIFE-- IT'S THE *SAME* TYPE OF DAGGER MICHAEL WAS STABBED WITH! COINCIDENCE...
...OR HAVE I BLUNDERED INTO A TRAP?!
eh?
A FIGURE IN THE DOORWAY-- IT'S HUGE--THROWING SOMETHING!
A SPEAR!
THWUNK


YOU ARE FORMIDABLE PREY-- MOVING WITH THE SWIFTNESS OF THE LEAPING GAZELLE. BUT HAD I TRULY INTENDED YOUR DEATH, YOU WOULD NOW HANG IMPALED ON THE WALL BEHIND YOU.
THEN I GUESS I OWE YOU ONE, BWANA. SO JUST LET ME ADJUST MY WIDOW'S BITE, AND IF YOU'RE LUCKY, IT'LL ONLY BREAK A FEW OF YOUR RIBS WHEN I FIRE IT.
WHPTT
MY WRIST!
DON'T SQUIRM, SWEETS. YOU'LL STRANGLE.
BUMP!
WHOA! SOMEBODY GIMME A HAND WITH THIS HEAH YARMINT!
RIGHT PURDY, LOTUS. RIGHT PURDY. THAT KICK WOULD'A CLEAN TAKEN THE HORNS OFF ANY TEXAS BEEF STEER I EVAH SAW!
HAAAIII!
UNNFFF!


I TRUST YOU FOUND OUR HELP SUFFICIENT, LARALIE?
YOU BET'CHA, BABES. SHE AIN'T GOIN' NOWHERE!
SORRY RED, BUT YOU JEST WALKED INTA THE LAST ROUNDUP!
NEXT
RING AROUND THE WIDOW!

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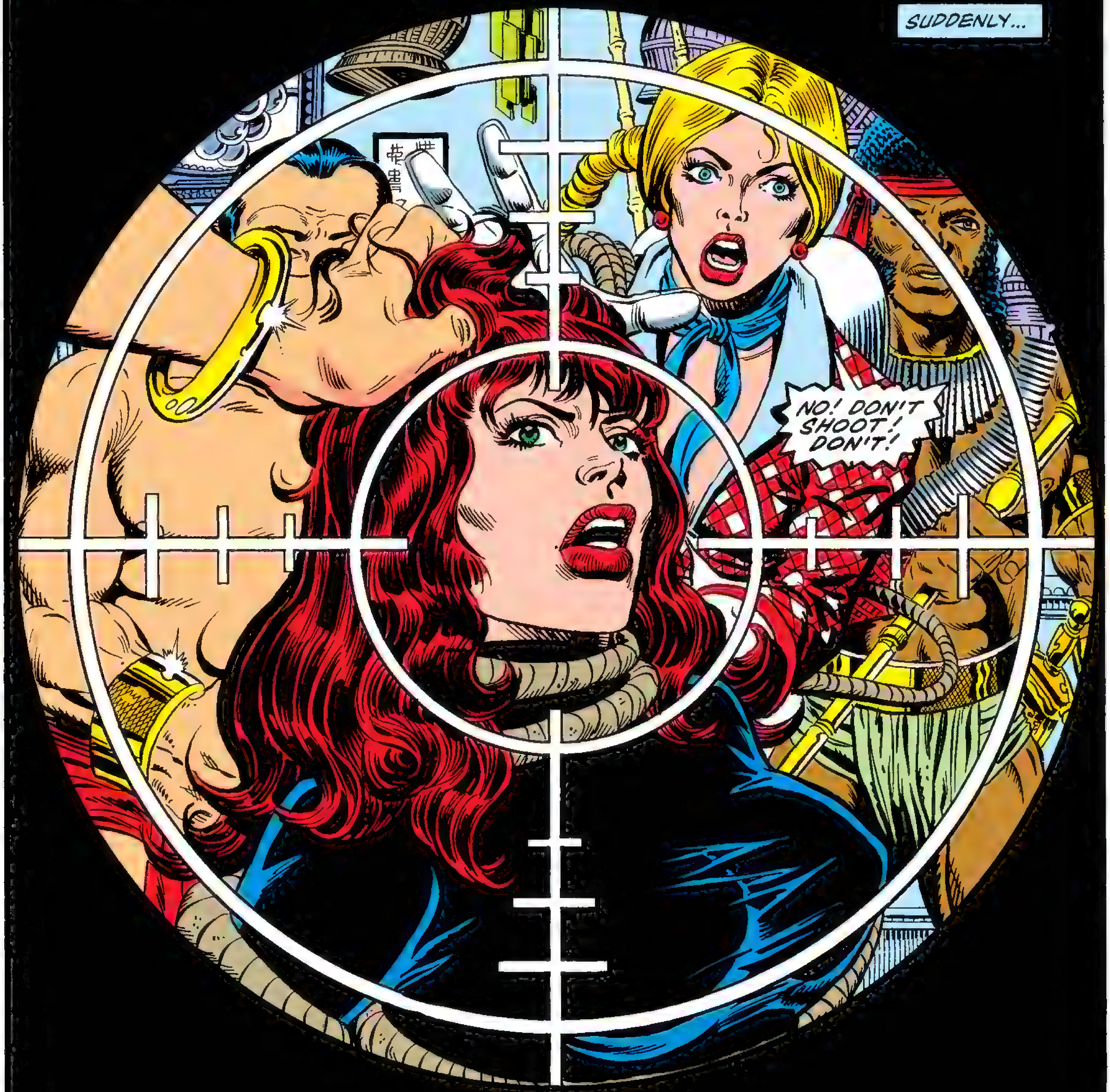
THE WEB TIGHTENS!

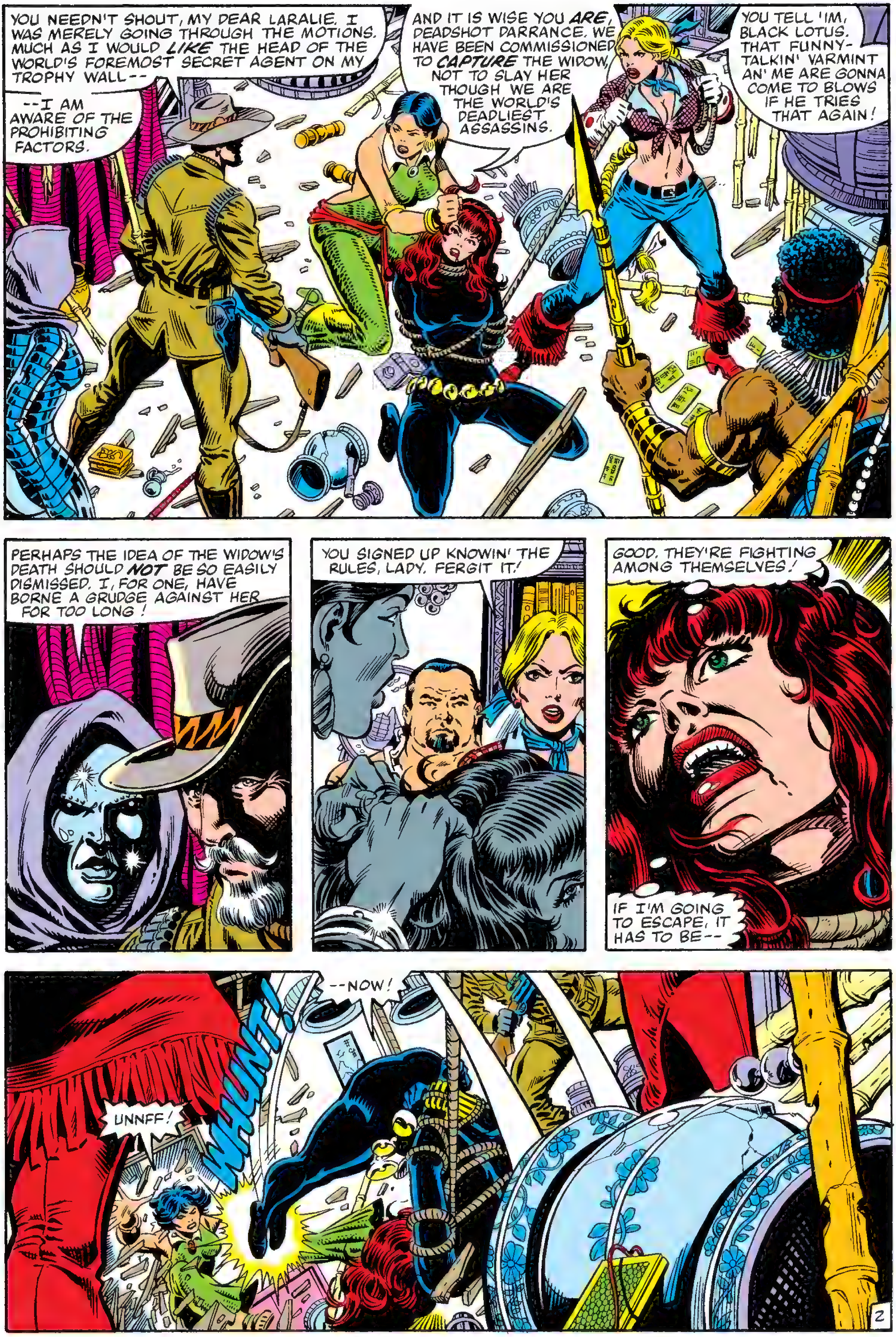
THE BLACK WIDOW HAS BEEN CAPTURED IN HONG KONG WHILE ON A MISSION FOR SHIELD, THE GLOBE-GIRDLING ESPIONAGE ORGANIZATION HEADED BY COLONEL NICK FURY. SHE STRUGGLES HELPLESSLY AGAINST HER BONDS, SURROUNDED BY HER CAPTORS--

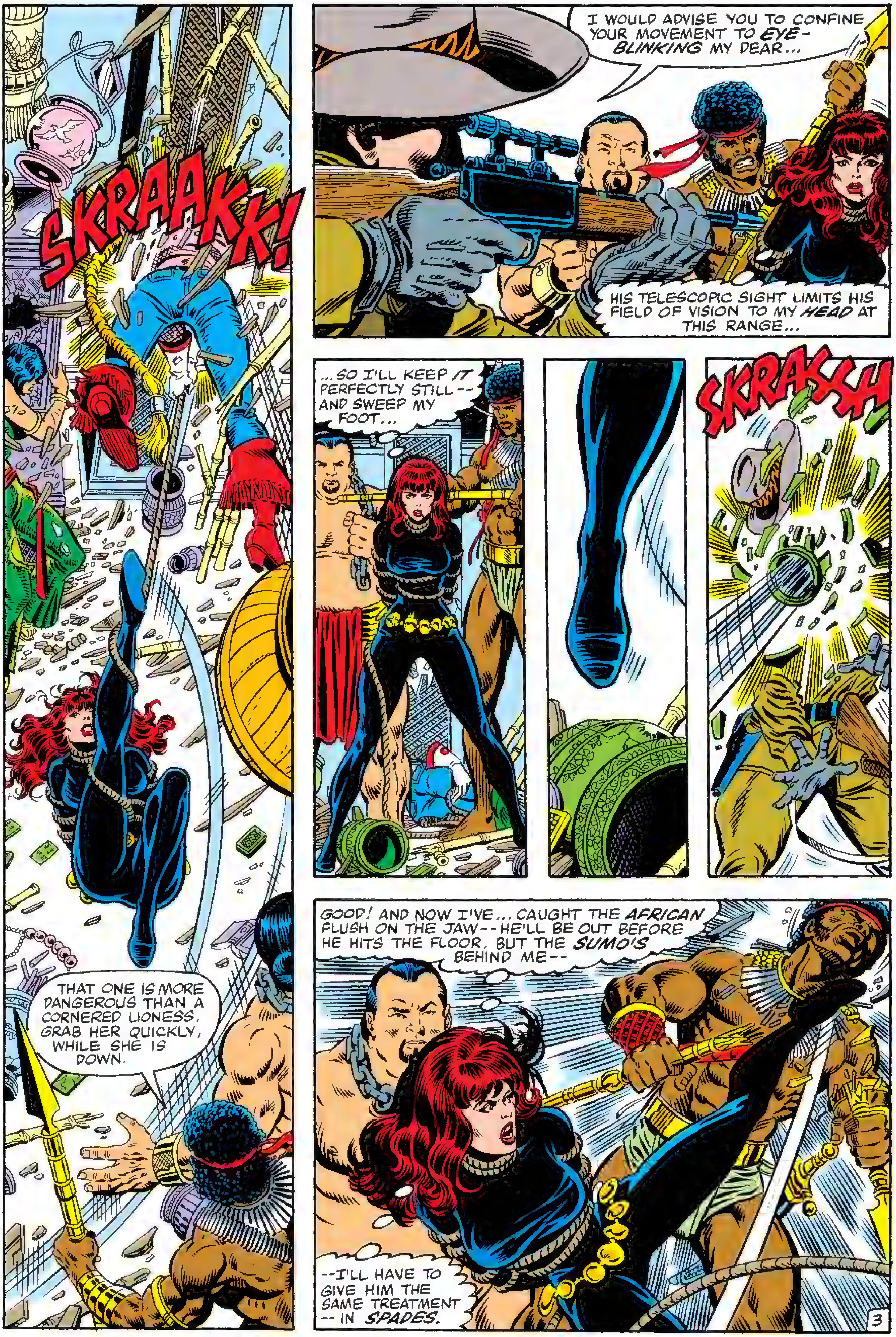
--AS THE GUNSIGHT OF A HIGH-POWERED RIFLE FOCUSES MENACINGLY ON HER EXQUISITE FACE.

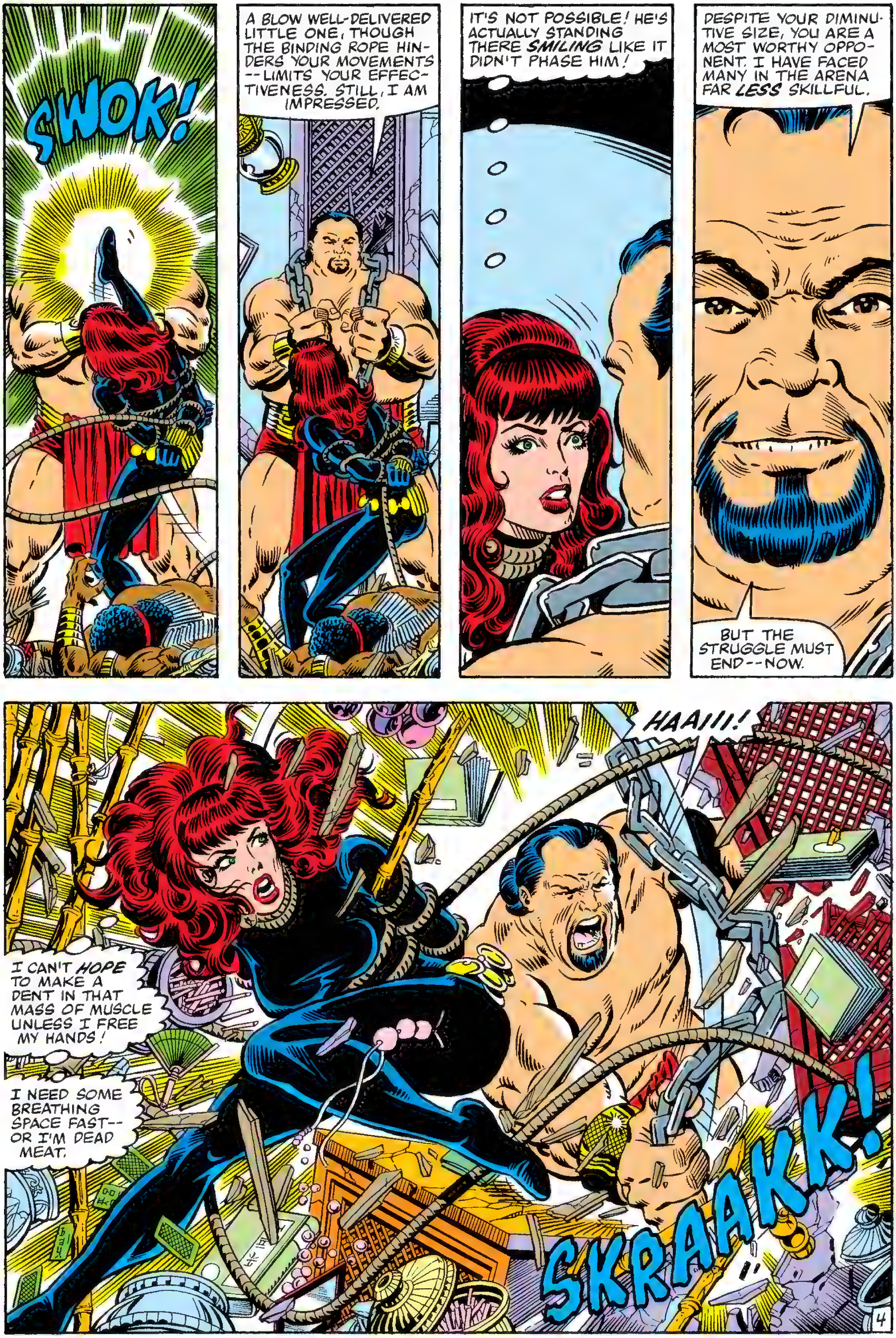
SUDDENLY...

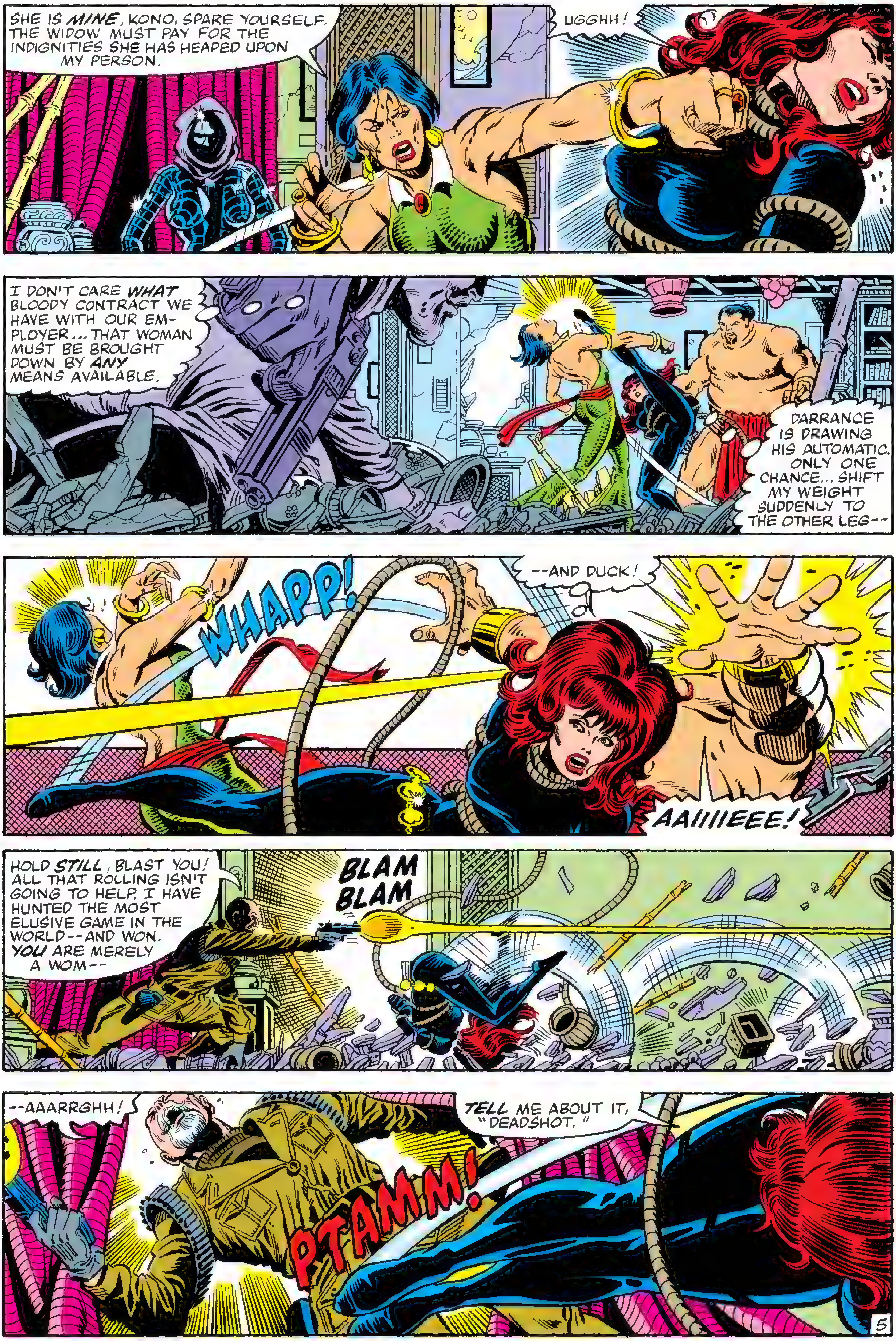

NO! DON'T SHOOT! DON'T!

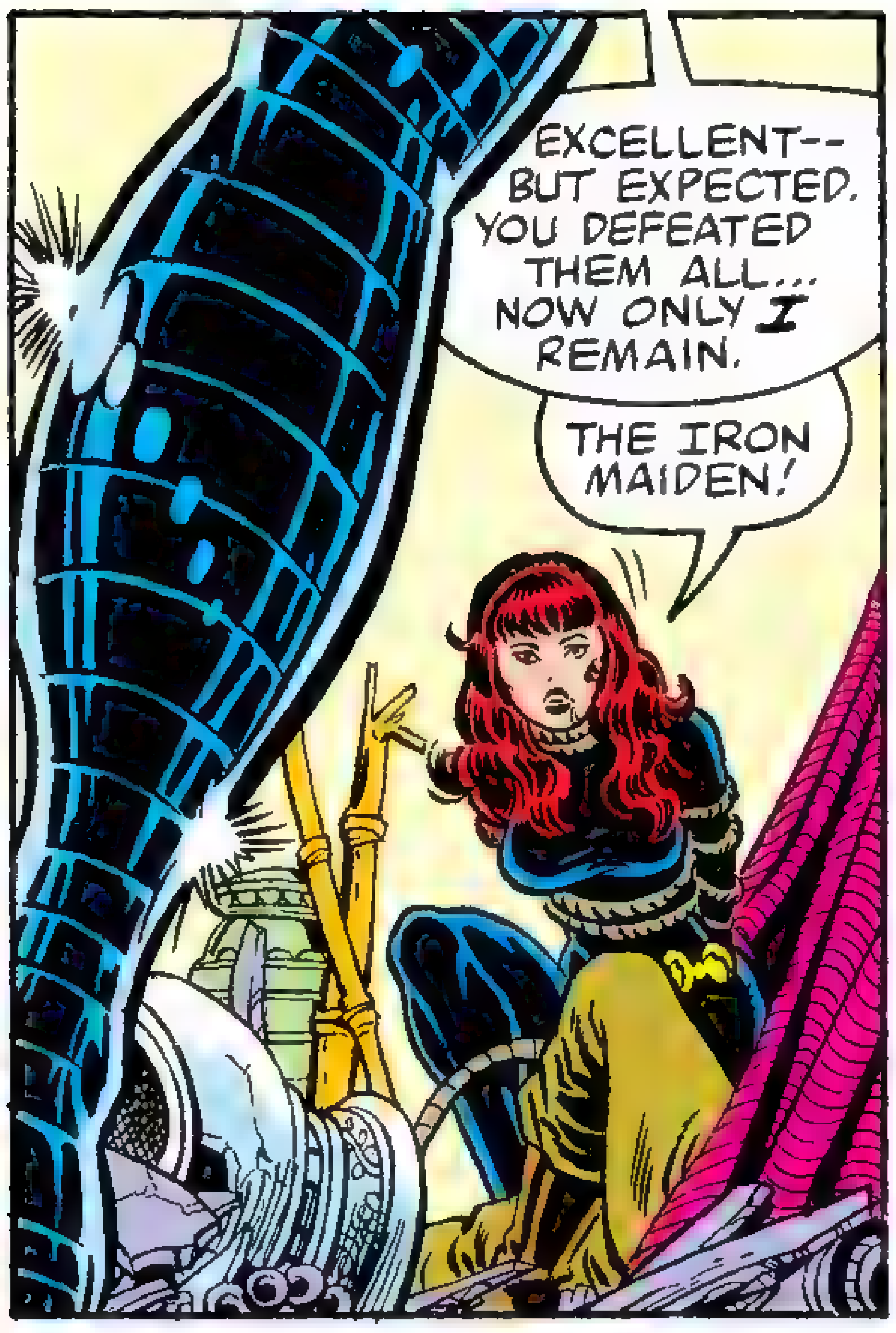
RALPH MACCHIO SCRIPTER ✱ GEORGE PEREZ PENCILER / CO-PLOTTER ✱ AL MILGROM INKER ✱ NOVAK, LETTERER SHAREN, COLORIST ✱ EDITORIAL EDITOR ✱ JIM SHOOTER ED-IN-CHIEF

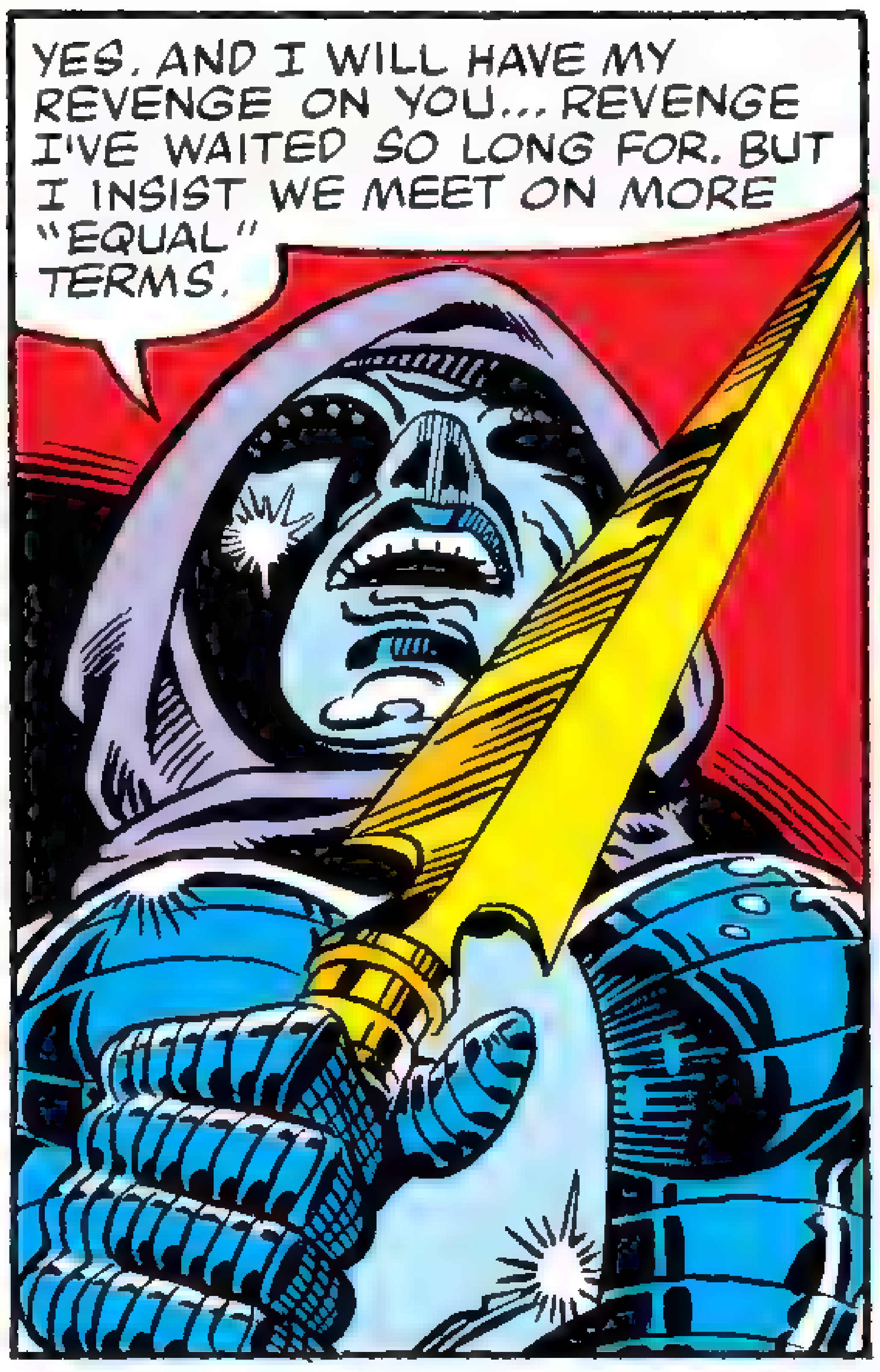

YOU NEEDN'T SHOUT, MY DEAR LARALIE. I WAS MERELY GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS. MUCH AS I WOULD *LIKE* THE HEAD OF THE WORLD'S FOREMOST SECRET AGENT ON MY TROPHY WALL--
--I AM AWARE OF THE PROHIBITING FACTORS.
AND IT IS WISE YOU *ARE*, DEADSHOT DARRANCE. WE HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED TO *CAPTURE* THE WIDOW, NOT TO SLAY HER THOUGH WE ARE THE WORLD'S DEADLIEST ASSASSINS.
YOU TELL 'IM, BLACK LOTUS. THAT FUNNY-TALKIN' VARMINT AN' ME ARE GONNA COME TO BLOWS IF HE TRIES THAT AGAIN!
PERHAPS THE IDEA OF THE WIDOW'S DEATH SHOULD *NOT* BE SO EASILY DISMISSED. I, FOR ONE, HAVE BORNE A GRUDGE AGAINST HER FOR TOO LONG!
YOU SIGNED UP KNOWIN' THE RULES, LADY. FERGIT IT!
GOOD. THEY'RE FIGHTING AMONG THEMSELVES!
IF I'M GOING TO ESCAPE, IT HAS TO BE--
--NOW!
WHUNT!
UNNFF!

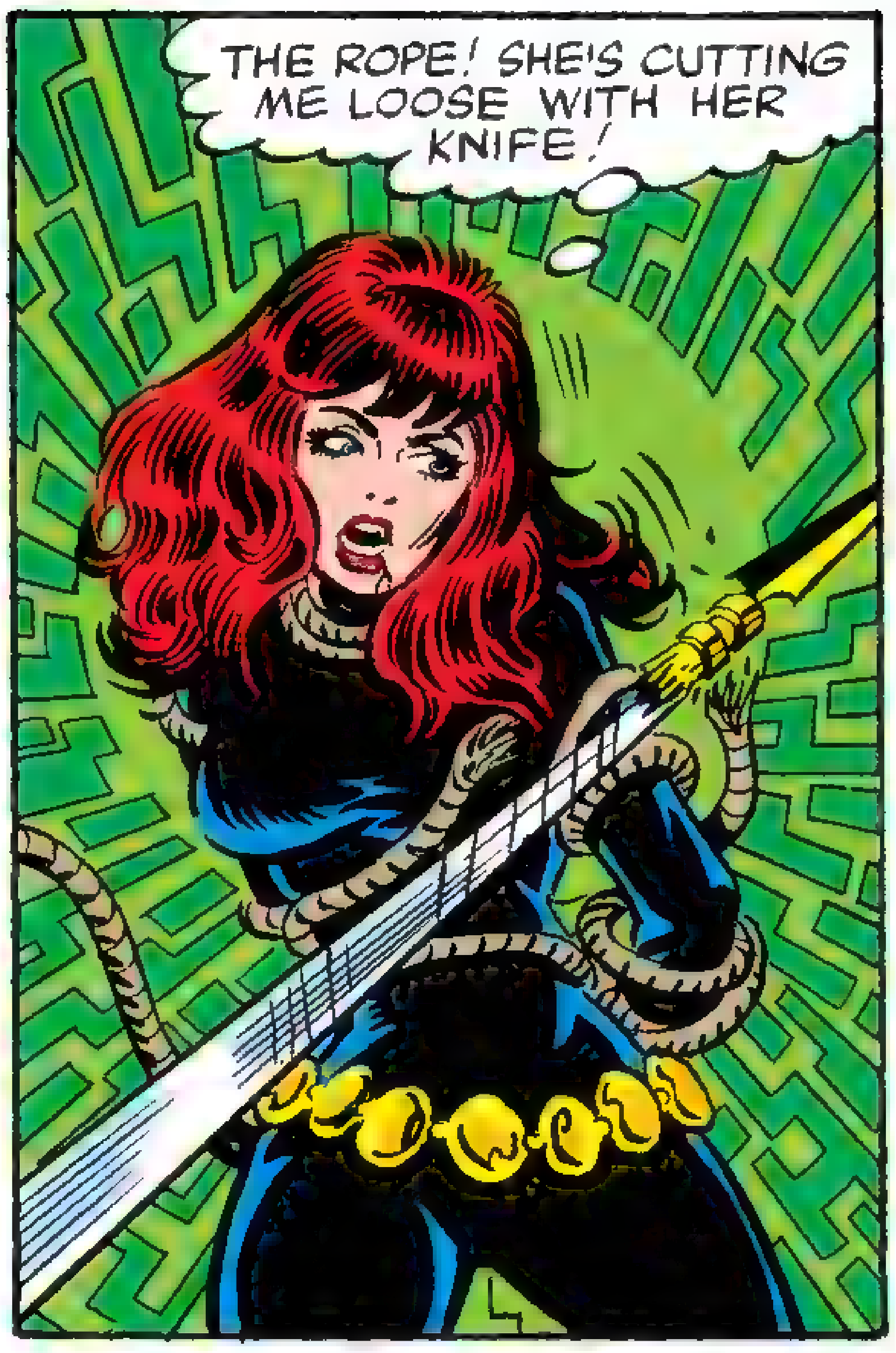

SKRAAKK!
THAT ONE IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN A CORNERED LIONESS. GRAB HER QUICKLY, WHILE SHE IS DOWN.
I WOULD ADVISE YOU TO CONFINE YOUR MOVEMENT TO *EYE-BLINKING* MY DEAR...
HIS TELESCOPIC SIGHT LIMITS HIS FIELD OF VISION TO MY *HEAD* AT THIS RANGE...
...SO I'LL KEEP *IT* PERFECTLY STILL--AND SWEEP MY FOOT...
SKRASSH
GOOD! AND NOW I'VE... CAUGHT THE *AFRICAN* FLUSH ON THE JAW--HE'LL BE OUT BEFORE HE HITS THE FLOOR. BUT THE *SUMO'S* BEHIND ME--
--I'LL HAVE TO GIVE HIM THE SAME TREATMENT -- IN *SPADES.*

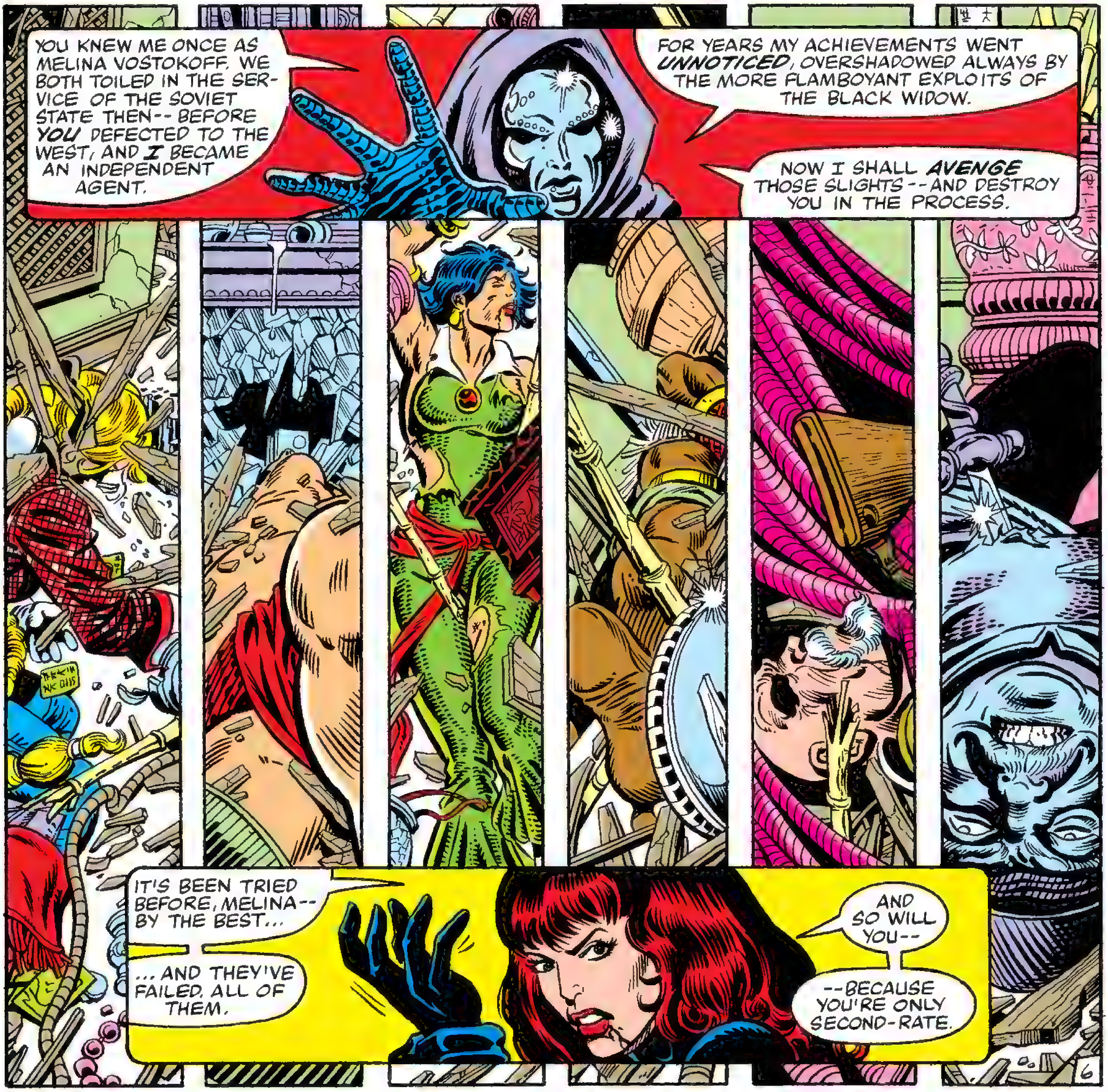

SWOK!
A BLOW WELL-DELIVERED LITTLE ONE, THOUGH THE BINDING ROPE HINDERS YOUR MOVEMENTS--LIMITS YOUR EFFECTIVENESS. STILL, I AM IMPRESSED.
IT'S NOT POSSIBLE! HE'S ACTUALLY STANDING THERE *SMILING* LIKE IT DIDN'T PHASE HIM!
DESPITE YOUR DIMINUTIVE SIZE, YOU ARE A MOST WORTHY OPPONENT. I HAVE FACED MANY IN THE ARENA FAR *LESS* SKILLFUL.
BUT THE STRUGGLE MUST END--NOW.
HAAIII!
I CAN'T *HOPE* TO MAKE A DENT IN THAT MASS OF MUSCLE UNLESS I FREE MY HANDS!
I NEED SOME BREATHING SPACE FAST--OR I'M DEAD MEAT.
SKRAAKK!

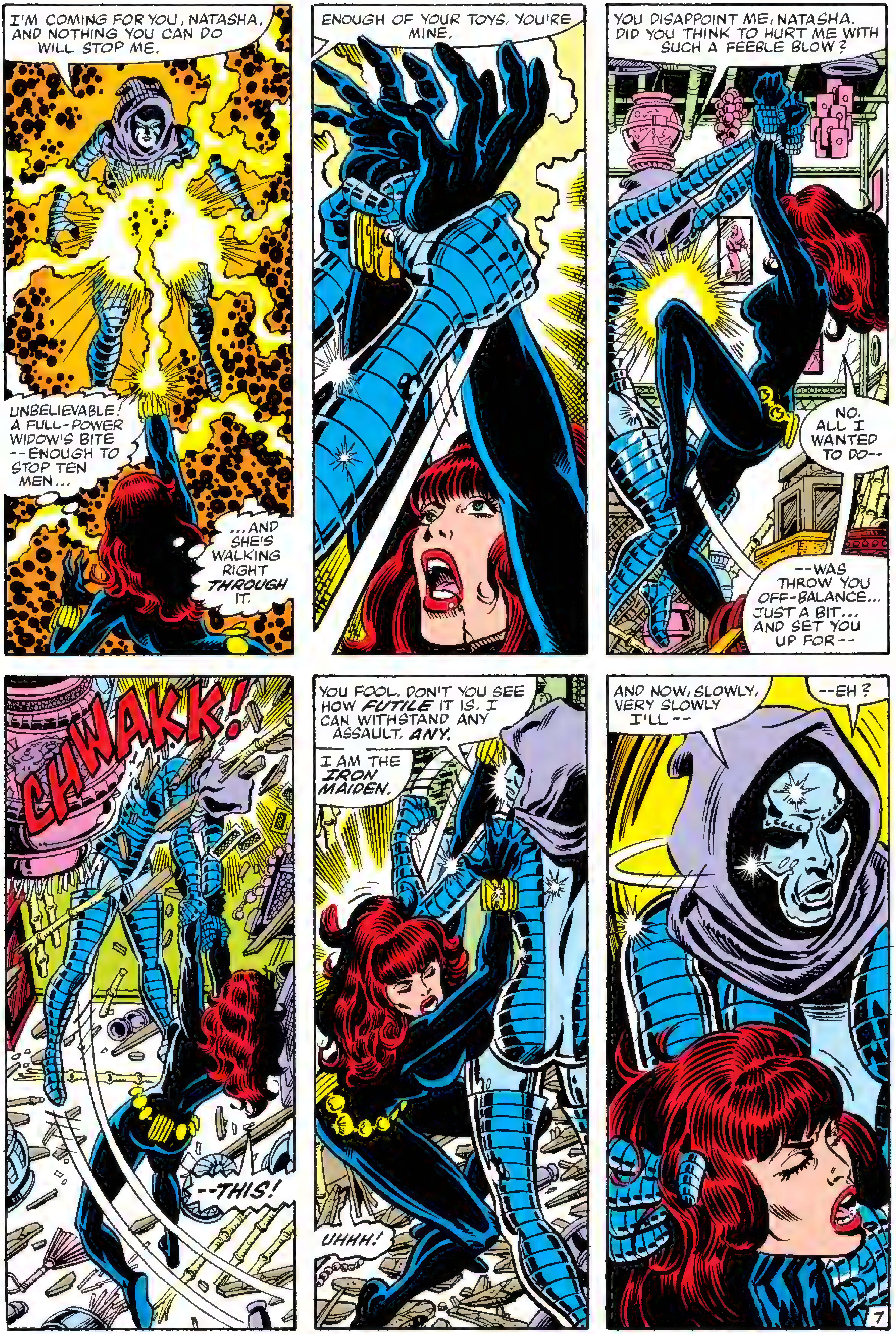

SHE IS *MINE*, KONO. SPARE YOURSELF. THE WIDOW MUST PAY FOR THE INDIGNITIES SHE HAS HEAPED UPON MY PERSON.
UGGHH!
I DON'T CARE *WHAT* BLOODY CONTRACT WE HAVE WITH OUR EMPLOYER... THAT WOMAN MUST BE BROUGHT DOWN BY *ANY* MEANS AVAILABLE.
DARRANCE IS DRAWING HIS AUTOMATIC. ONLY ONE CHANCE... SHIFT MY WEIGHT SUDDENLY TO THE OTHER LEG--
WHAPP!
--AND DUCK!
AAIIIIEEE!
HOLD *STILL*, BLAST YOU! ALL THAT ROLLING ISN'T GOING TO HELP. I HAVE HUNTED THE MOST ELUSIVE GAME IN THE WORLD--AND WON. *YOU* ARE MERELY A WOM--
BLAM BLAM
--AAARRGHH!
TELL ME ABOUT IT, "DEADSHOT."
PTAMM!

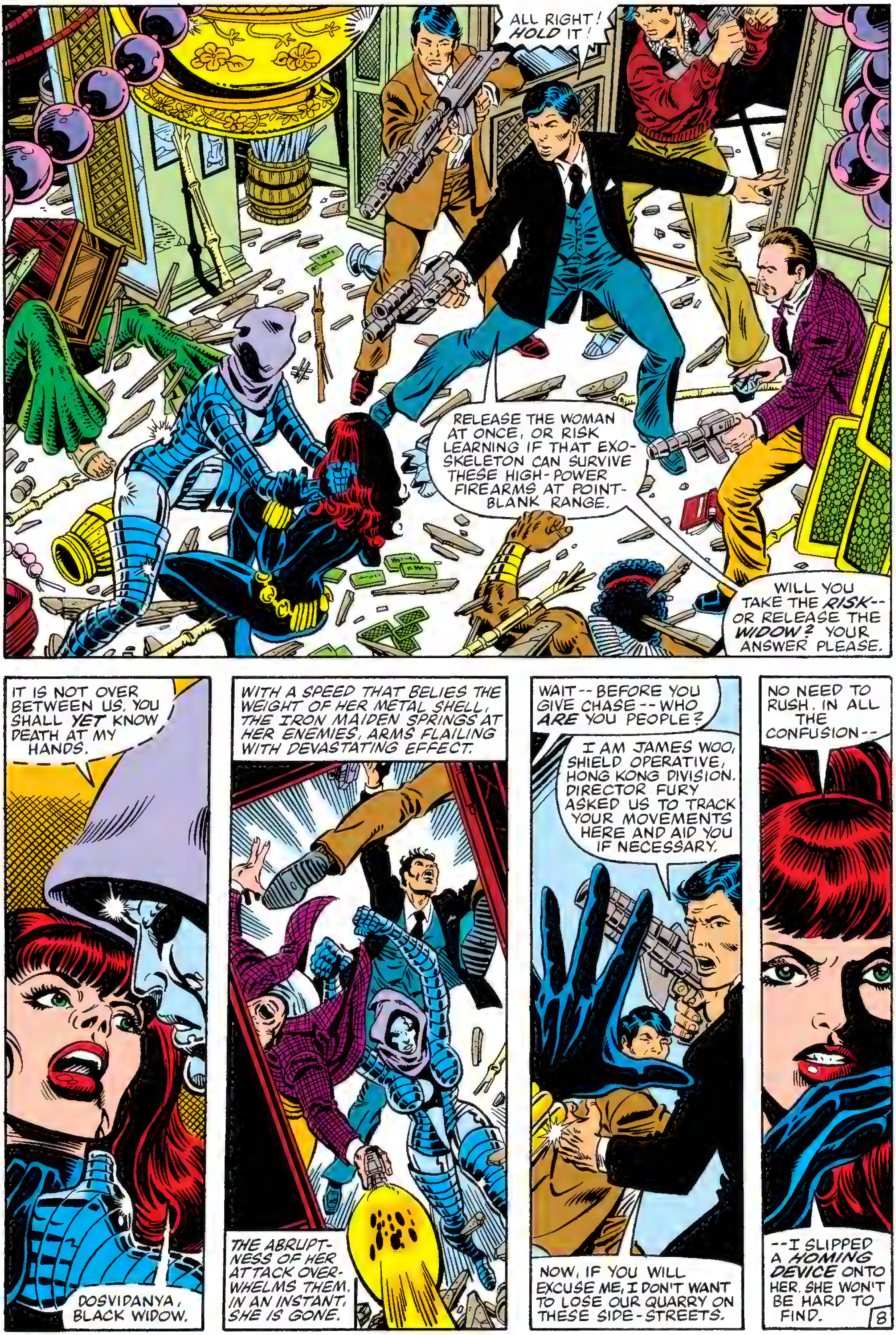

EXCELLENT-- BUT EXPECTED. YOU DEFEATED THEM ALL... NOW ONLY *I* REMAIN.
THE IRON MAIDEN!

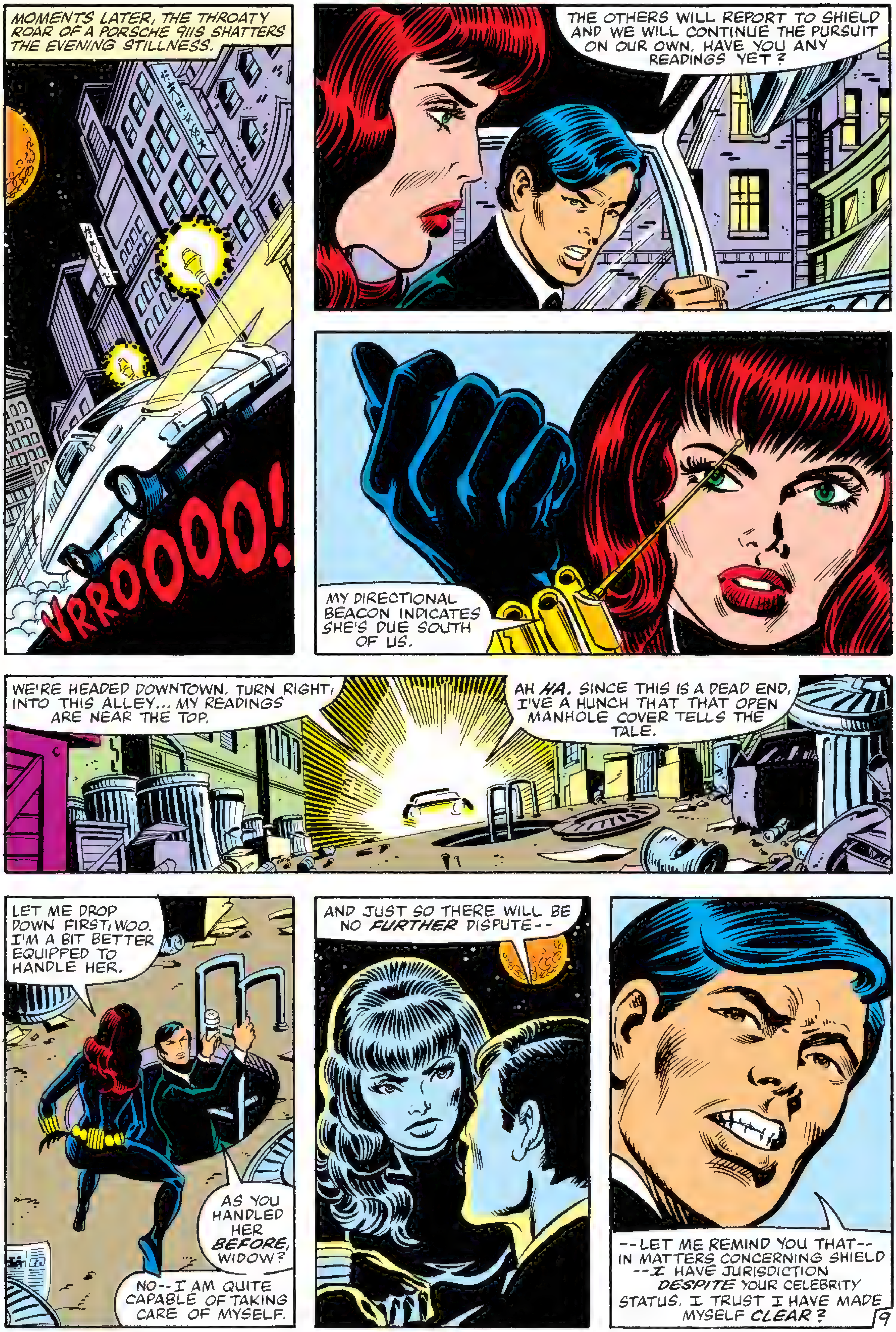

YES. AND I WILL HAVE MY REVENGE ON YOU... REVENGE I'VE WAITED SO LONG FOR. BUT I INSIST WE MEET ON MORE "EQUAL" TERMS.

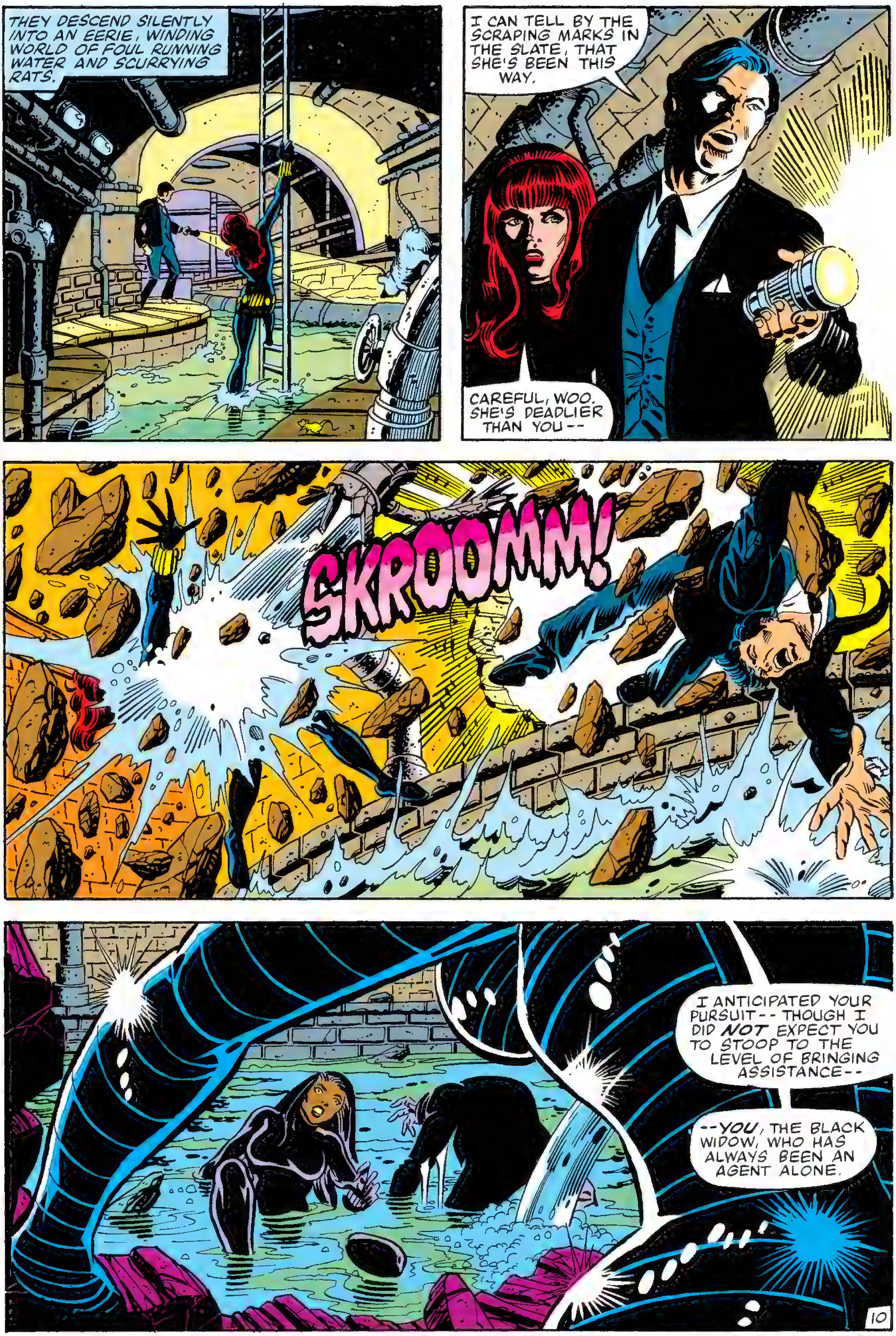

THE ROPE! SHE'S CUTTING ME LOOSE WITH HER KNIFE!

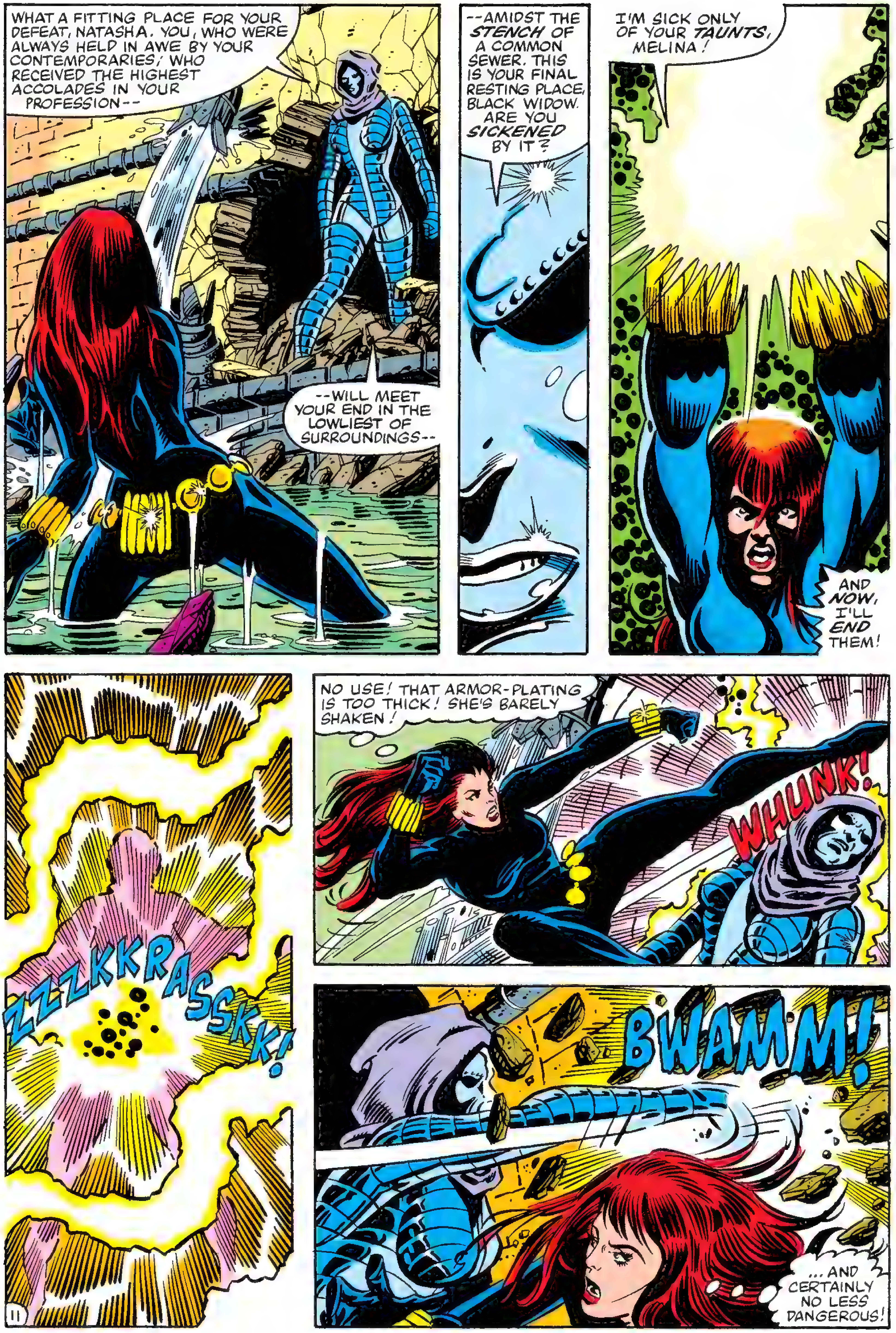

YOU KNEW ME ONCE AS MELINA VOSTOKOFF. WE BOTH TOILED IN THE SERVICE OF THE SOVIET STATE THEN-- BEFORE *YOU* DEFECTED TO THE WEST, AND *I* BECAME AN INDEPENDENT AGENT.
FOR YEARS MY ACHIEVEMENTS WENT *UNNOTICED*, OVERSHADOWED ALWAYS BY THE MORE FLAMBOYANT EXPLOITS OF THE BLACK WIDOW.
NOW I SHALL *AVENGE* THOSE SLIGHTS--AND DESTROY YOU IN THE PROCESS.
IT'S BEEN TRIED BEFORE, MELINA-- BY THE BEST...
...AND THEY'VE FAILED, ALL OF THEM.
AND SO WILL YOU--
--BECAUSE YOU'RE ONLY SECOND-RATE.

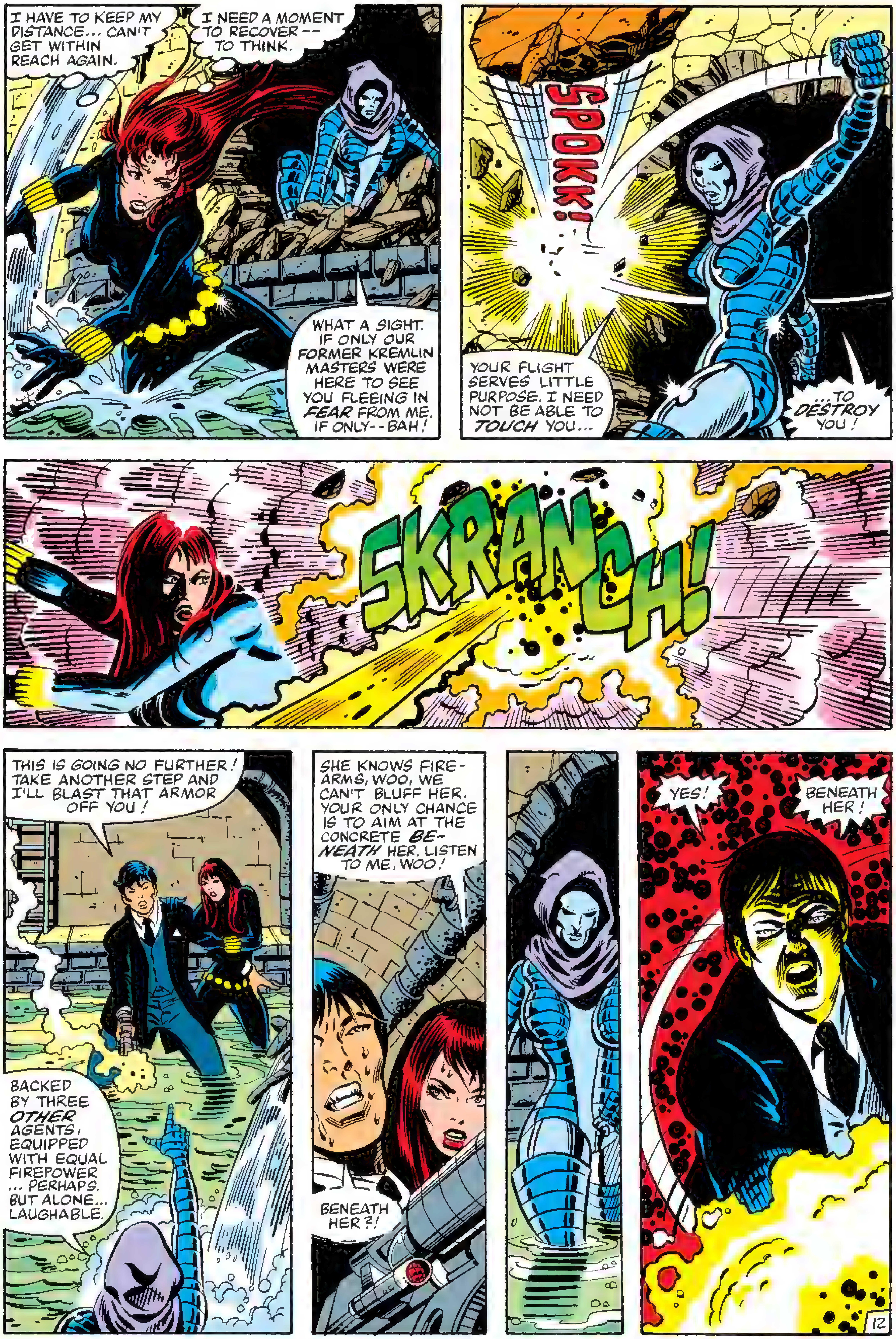

I'M COMING FOR YOU, NATASHA, AND NOTHING YOU CAN DO WILL STOP ME.
UNBELIEVABLE! A FULL-POWER WIDOW'S BITE --ENOUGH TO STOP TEN MEN...
...AND SHE'S WALKING RIGHT *THROUGH* IT.
ENOUGH OF YOUR TOYS. YOU'RE MINE.
YOU DISAPPOINT ME, NATASHA. DID YOU THINK TO HURT ME WITH SUCH A FEEBLE BLOW?
NO. ALL I WANTED TO DO--
--WAS THROW YOU OFF-BALANCE... JUST A BIT... AND SET YOU UP FOR--
CHWAKK!
--THIS!
YOU FOOL. DON'T YOU SEE HOW *FUTILE* IT IS. I CAN WITHSTAND ANY ASSAULT. *ANY.*
I AM THE *IRON MAIDEN.*
UHHH!
AND NOW, SLOWLY, VERY SLOWLY I'LL--
--EH?

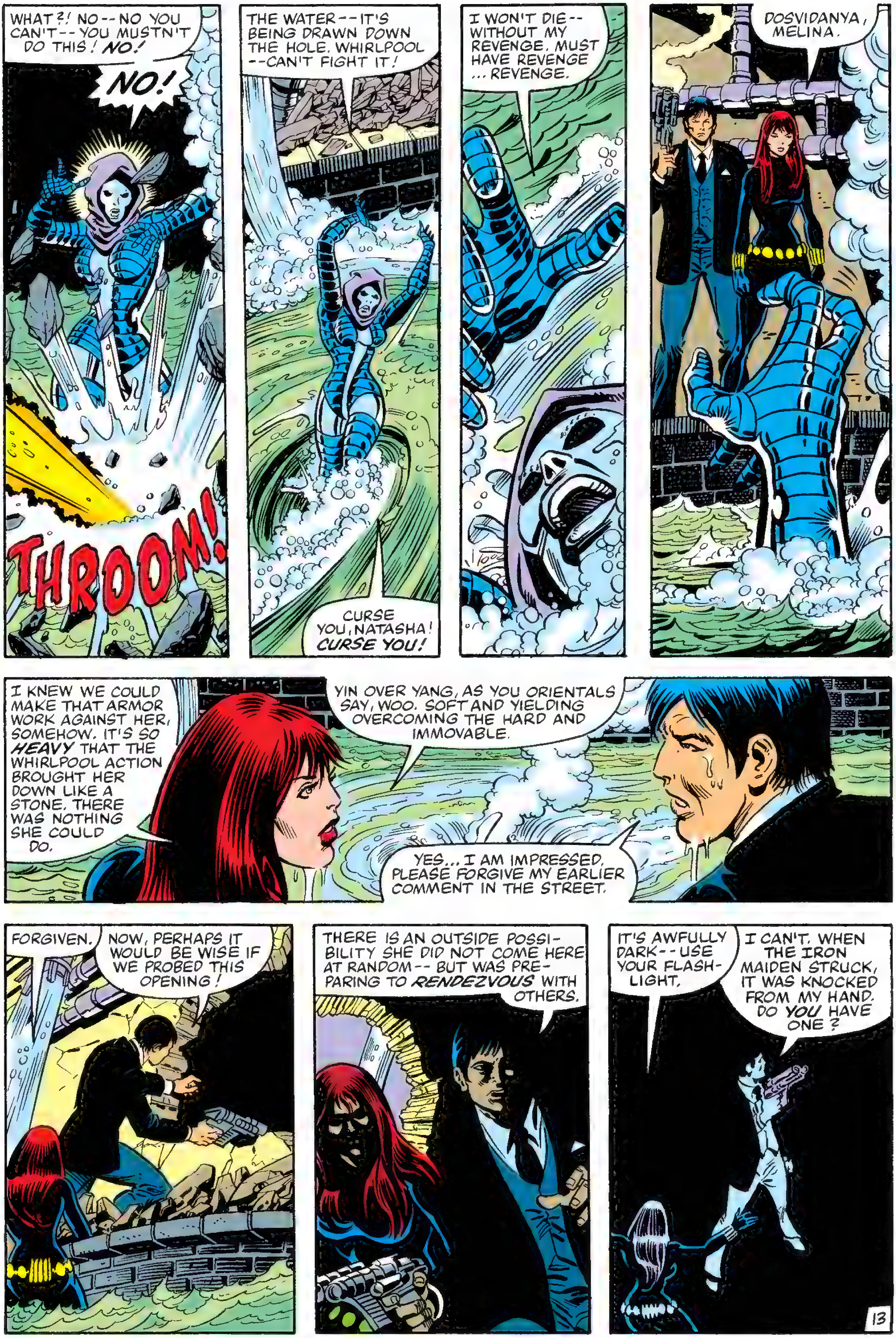

ALL RIGHT! *HOLD* IT!
RELEASE THE WOMAN AT ONCE, OR RISK LEARNING IF THAT EXO-SKELETON CAN SURVIVE THESE HIGH-POWER FIREARMS AT POINT-BLANK RANGE.
WILL YOU TAKE THE *RISK*-- OR RELEASE THE *WIDOW?* YOUR ANSWER PLEASE.
IT IS NOT OVER BETWEEN US. YOU SHALL *YET* KNOW DEATH AT MY HANDS.
DOSVIDANYA, BLACK WIDOW.
WITH A SPEED THAT BELIES THE WEIGHT OF HER METAL SHELL, THE IRON MAIDEN SPRINGS AT HER ENEMIES, ARMS FLAILING WITH DEVASTATING EFFECT.
THE ABRUPTNESS OF HER ATTACK OVERWHELMS THEM. IN AN INSTANT, SHE IS GONE.
WAIT--BEFORE YOU GIVE CHASE--WHO *ARE* YOU PEOPLE?
I AM JAMES WOO, SHIELD OPERATIVE, HONG KONG DIVISION. DIRECTOR FURY ASKED US TO TRACK YOUR MOVEMENTS HERE AND AID YOU IF NECESSARY.
NOW, IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME, I DON'T WANT TO LOSE OUR QUARRY ON THESE SIDE-STREETS.
NO NEED TO RUSH. IN ALL THE CONFUSION--
--I SLIPPED A *HOMING DEVICE* ONTO HER. SHE WON'T BE HARD TO FIND.

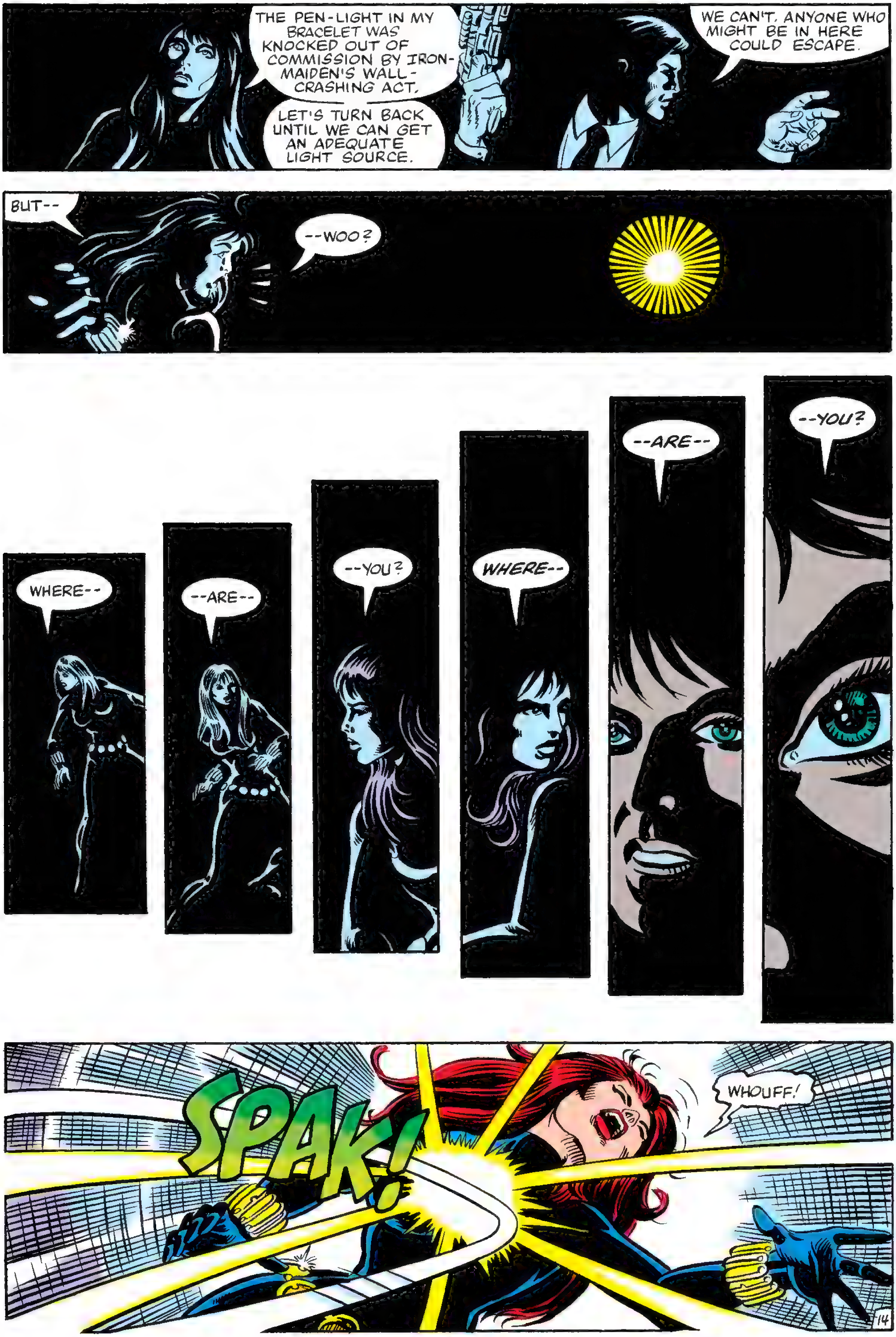

MOMENTS LATER, THE THROATY ROAR OF A PORSCHE 911S SHATTERS THE EVENING STILLNESS.
VRROOOO!
THE OTHERS WILL REPORT TO SHIELD AND WE WILL CONTINUE THE PURSUIT ON OUR OWN. HAVE YOU ANY READINGS YET?
MY DIRECTIONAL BEACON INDICATES SHE'S DUE SOUTH OF US.
WE'RE HEADED DOWNTOWN. TURN RIGHT, INTO THIS ALLEY... MY READINGS ARE NEAR THE TOP.
AH *HA*. SINCE THIS IS A DEAD END, I'VE A HUNCH THAT THAT OPEN MANHOLE COVER TELLS THE TALE.
LET ME DROP DOWN FIRST, WOO. I'M A BIT BETTER EQUIPPED TO HANDLE HER.
AS YOU HANDLED HER *BEFORE*, WIDOW?
NO--I AM QUITE CAPABLE OF TAKING CARE OF MYSELF.
AND JUST SO THERE WILL BE NO *FURTHER* DISPUTE--
--LET ME REMIND YOU THAT--IN MATTERS CONCERNING SHIELD--I HAVE JURISDICTION *DESPITE* YOUR CELEBRITY STATUS. I TRUST I HAVE MADE MYSELF *CLEAR*?

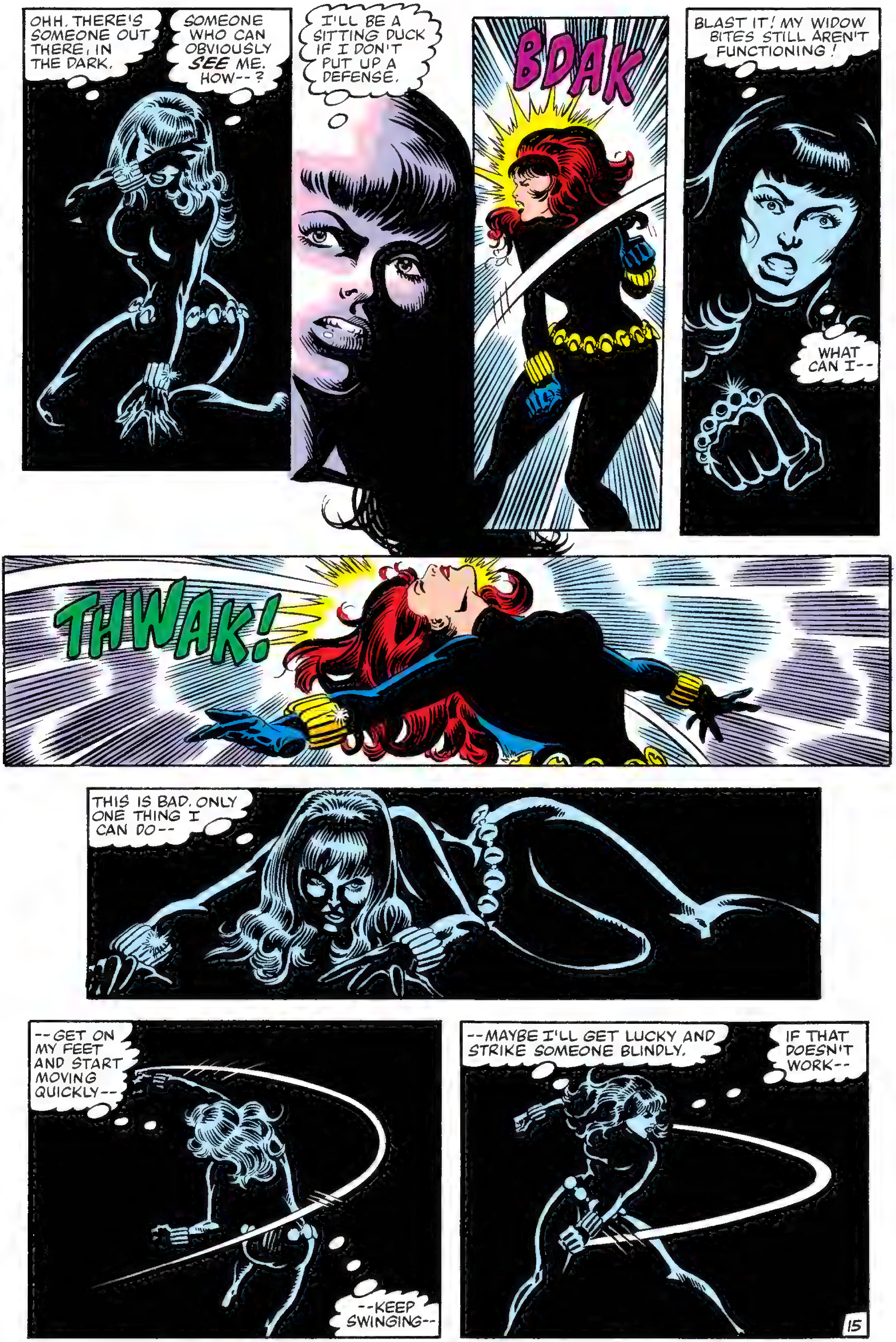

THEY DESCEND SILENTLY INTO AN EERIE, WINDING WORLD OF FOUL RUNNING WATER AND SCURRYING RATS.
I CAN TELL BY THE SCRAPING MARKS IN THE SLATE, THAT SHE'S BEEN THIS WAY.
CAREFUL, WOO. SHE'S DEADLIER THAN YOU--
SKROOMM!
I ANTICIPATED YOUR PURSUIT--THOUGH I DID *NOT* EXPECT YOU TO STOOP TO THE LEVEL OF BRINGING ASSISTANCE--
--*YOU*, THE BLACK WIDOW, WHO HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN AGENT ALONE.

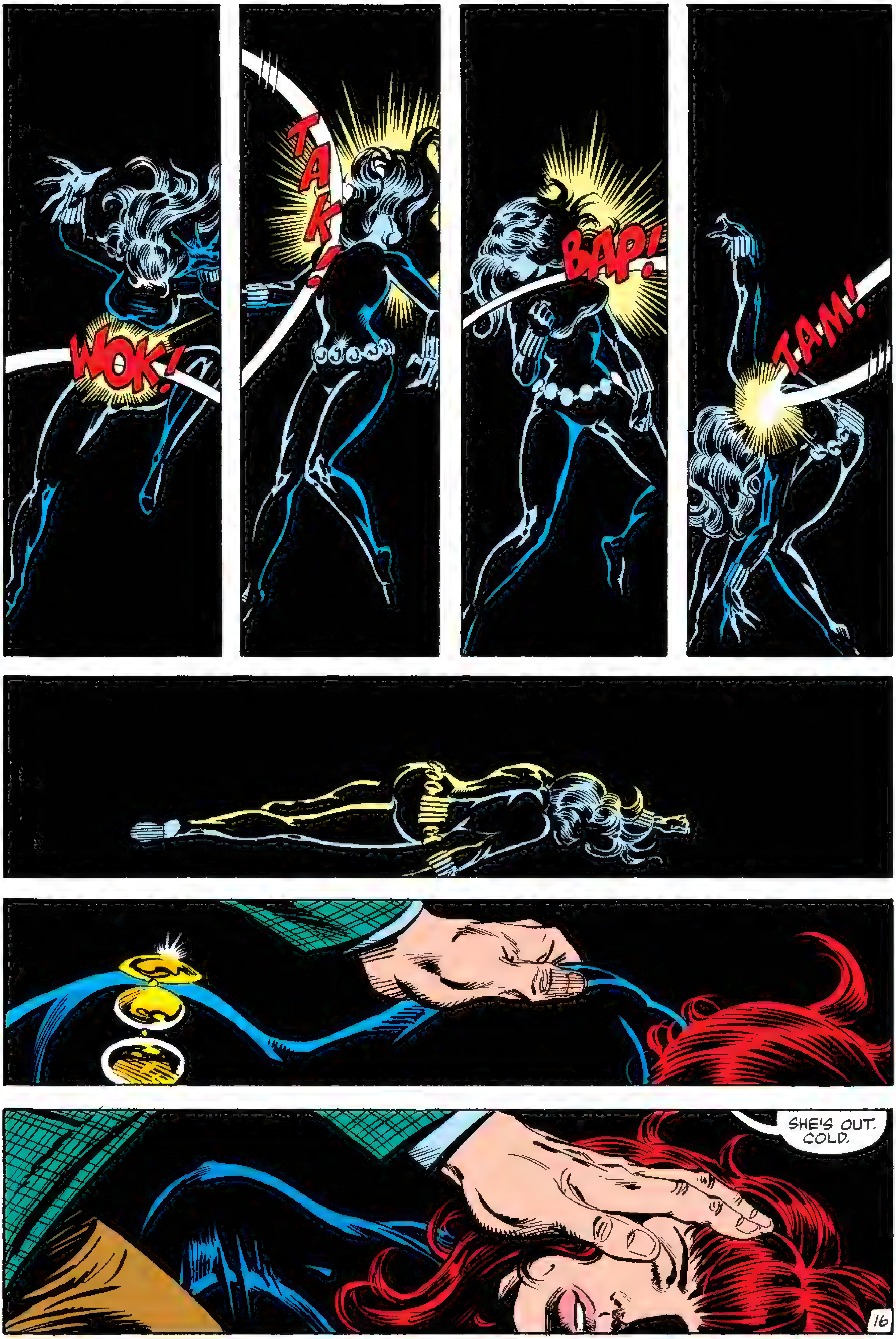

WHAT A FITTING PLACE FOR YOUR DEFEAT, NATASHA. YOU, WHO WERE ALWAYS HELD IN AWE BY YOUR CONTEMPORARIES; WHO RECEIVED THE HIGHEST ACCOLADES IN YOUR PROFESSION--
--WILL MEET YOUR END IN THE LOWLIEST OF SURROUNDINGS--
--AMIDST THE *STENCH* OF A COMMON SEWER. THIS IS YOUR FINAL RESTING PLACE, BLACK WIDOW. ARE YOU *SICKENED* BY IT?
I'M SICK ONLY OF YOUR *TAUNTS*, MELINA!
AND *NOW*, I'LL *END* THEM!
ZZZKKRASSKK!
NO USE! THAT ARMOR-PLATING IS TOO THICK! SHE'S BARELY SHAKEN!
WHUNK!
BWAMM!
...AND CERTAINLY NO LESS DANGEROUS!

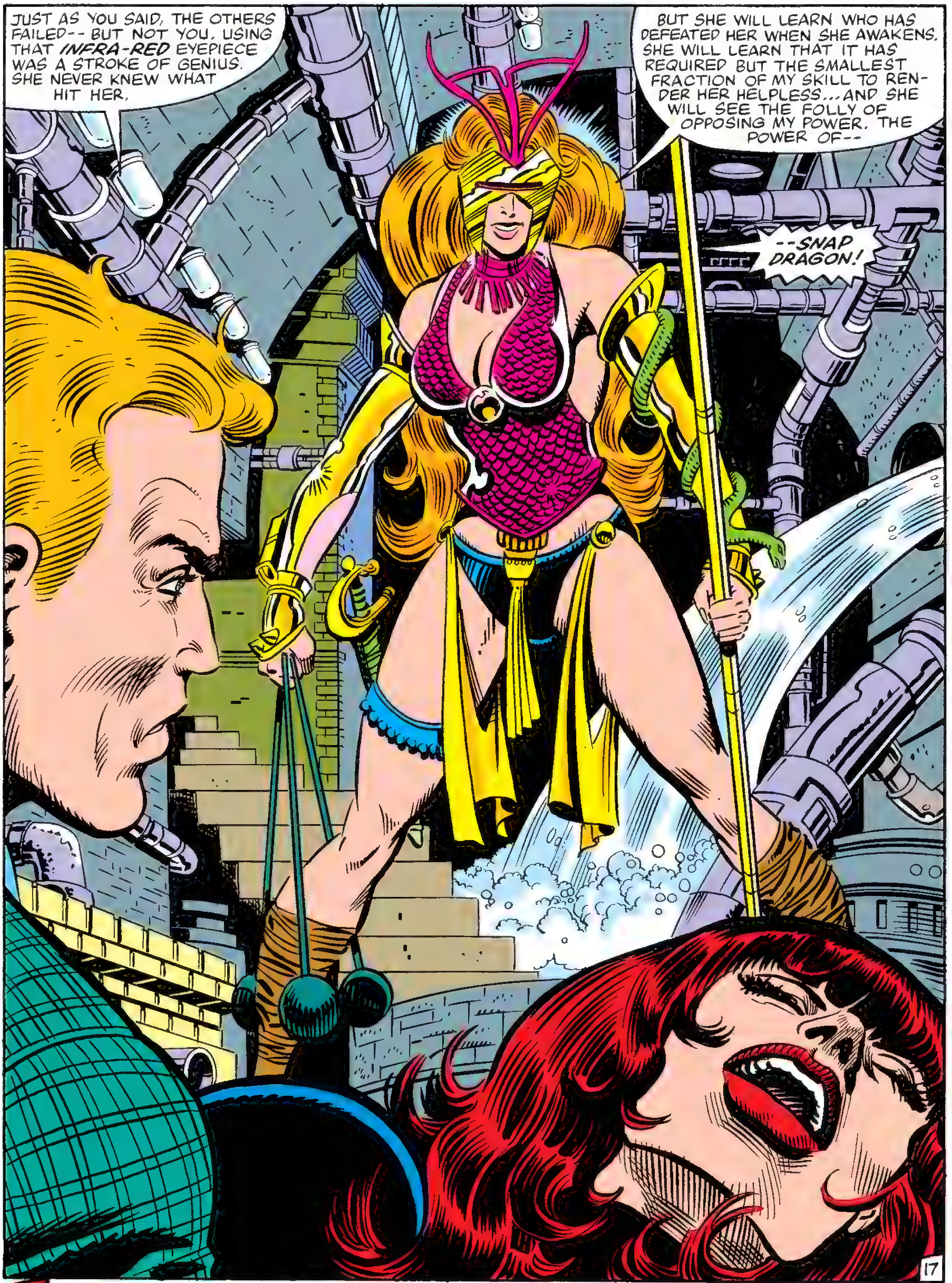

I HAVE TO KEEP MY DISTANCE... CAN'T GET WITHIN REACH AGAIN.
I NEED A MOMENT TO RECOVER -- TO THINK.
WHAT A SIGHT. IF ONLY OUR FORMER KREMLIN MASTERS WERE HERE TO SEE YOU FLEEING IN *FEAR* FROM ME. IF ONLY--BAH!
SPOKK!
YOUR FLIGHT SERVES LITTLE PURPOSE. I NEED NOT BE ABLE TO *TOUCH* YOU...
...TO *DESTROY* YOU!
SKRANCH!
THIS IS GOING NO FURTHER! TAKE ANOTHER STEP AND I'LL BLAST THAT ARMOR OFF YOU!
BACKED BY THREE *OTHER* AGENTS, EQUIPPED WITH EQUAL FIREPOWER ... PERHAPS. BUT ALONE... LAUGHABLE.
SHE KNOWS FIREARMS, WOO, WE CAN'T BLUFF HER. YOUR ONLY CHANCE IS TO AIM AT THE CONCRETE *BENEATH* HER. LISTEN TO ME, WOO!
BENEATH HER?!
YES!
BENEATH HER!


WHAT?! NO--NO YOU CAN'T--YOU MUSTN'T DO THIS! NO!
NO!
THROOM!
THE WATER--IT'S BEING DRAWN DOWN THE HOLE. WHIRLPOOL --CAN'T FIGHT IT!
CURSE YOU, NATASHA! CURSE YOU!
I WON'T DIE--WITHOUT MY REVENGE. MUST HAVE REVENGE ... REVENGE.
DOSVIDANYA, MELINA.
I KNEW WE COULD MAKE THAT ARMOR WORK AGAINST HER, SOMEHOW. IT'S SO HEAVY THAT THE WHIRLPOOL ACTION BROUGHT HER DOWN LIKE A STONE. THERE WAS NOTHING SHE COULD DO.
YIN OVER YANG, AS YOU ORIENTALS SAY, WOO. SOFT AND YIELDING OVERCOMING THE HARD AND IMMOVABLE.
YES... I AM IMPRESSED. PLEASE FORGIVE MY EARLIER COMMENT IN THE STREET.
FORGIVEN.
NOW, PERHAPS IT WOULD BE WISE IF WE PROBED THIS OPENING!
THERE IS AN OUTSIDE POSSIBILITY SHE DID NOT COME HERE AT RANDOM--BUT WAS PREPARING TO RENDEZVOUS WITH OTHERS.
IT'S AWFULLY DARK--USE YOUR FLASHLIGHT.
I CAN'T. WHEN THE IRON MAIDEN STRUCK, IT WAS KNOCKED FROM MY HAND. DO YOU HAVE ONE?


THE PEN-LIGHT IN MY BRACELET WAS KNOCKED OUT OF COMMISSION BY IRON-MAIDEN'S WALL-CRASHING ACT.
LET'S TURN BACK UNTIL WE CAN GET AN ADEQUATE LIGHT SOURCE.
WE CAN'T. ANYONE WHO MIGHT BE IN HERE COULD ESCAPE.
BUT--
--WOO?
WHERE--
--ARE--
--YOU?
WHERE--
--ARE--
--YOU?
SPAK!
WHOUFF!


OHH, THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE, IN THE DARK.
SOMEONE WHO CAN OBVIOUSLY SEE ME. HOW-- ?
I'LL BE A SITTING DUCK IF I DON'T PUT UP A DEFENSE.
BDAK
BLAST IT! MY WIDOW BITES STILL AREN'T FUNCTIONING!
WHAT CAN I--
THWAK!
THIS IS BAD. ONLY ONE THING I CAN DO--
--GET ON MY FEET AND START MOVING QUICKLY--
--KEEP SWINGING--
--MAYBE I'LL GET LUCKY AND STRIKE SOMEONE BLINDLY.
IF THAT DOESN'T WORK--


WOK!
TAK!
BAP!
TAM!
SHE'S OUT COLD.


JUST AS YOU SAID, THE OTHERS FAILED-- BUT NOT YOU. USING THAT *INFRA-RED* EYEPIECE WAS A STROKE OF GENIUS. SHE NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HER.
BUT SHE WILL LEARN WHO HAS DEFEATED HER WHEN SHE AWAKENS. SHE WILL LEARN THAT IT HAS REQUIRED BUT THE SMALLEST FRACTION OF MY SKILL TO RENDER HER HELPLESS... AND SHE WILL SEE THE FOLLY OF OPPOSING MY POWER. THE POWER OF--
--SNAP DRAGON!

NEXT THE WIDOW ALONE!

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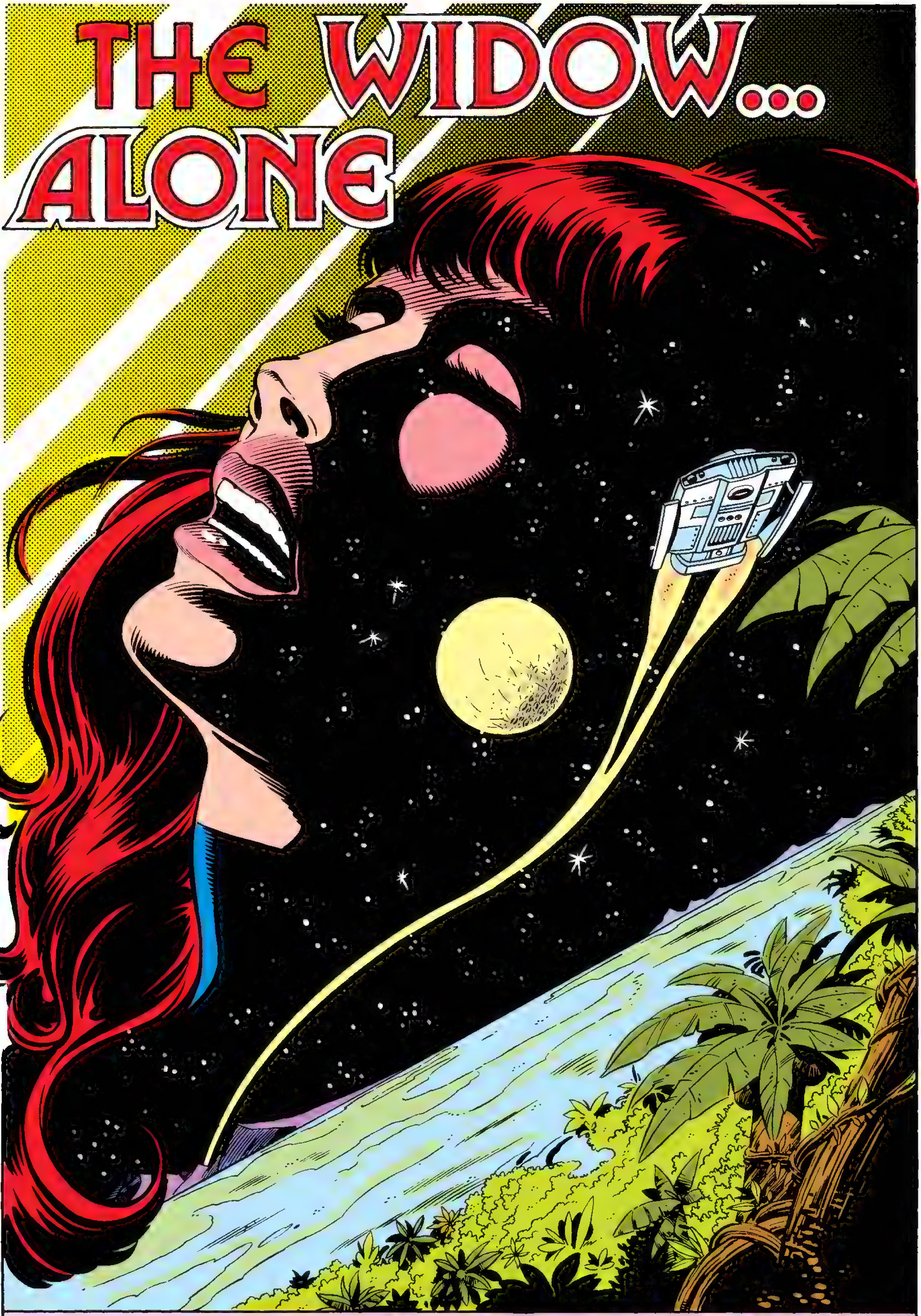
THE WIDOW... ALONE



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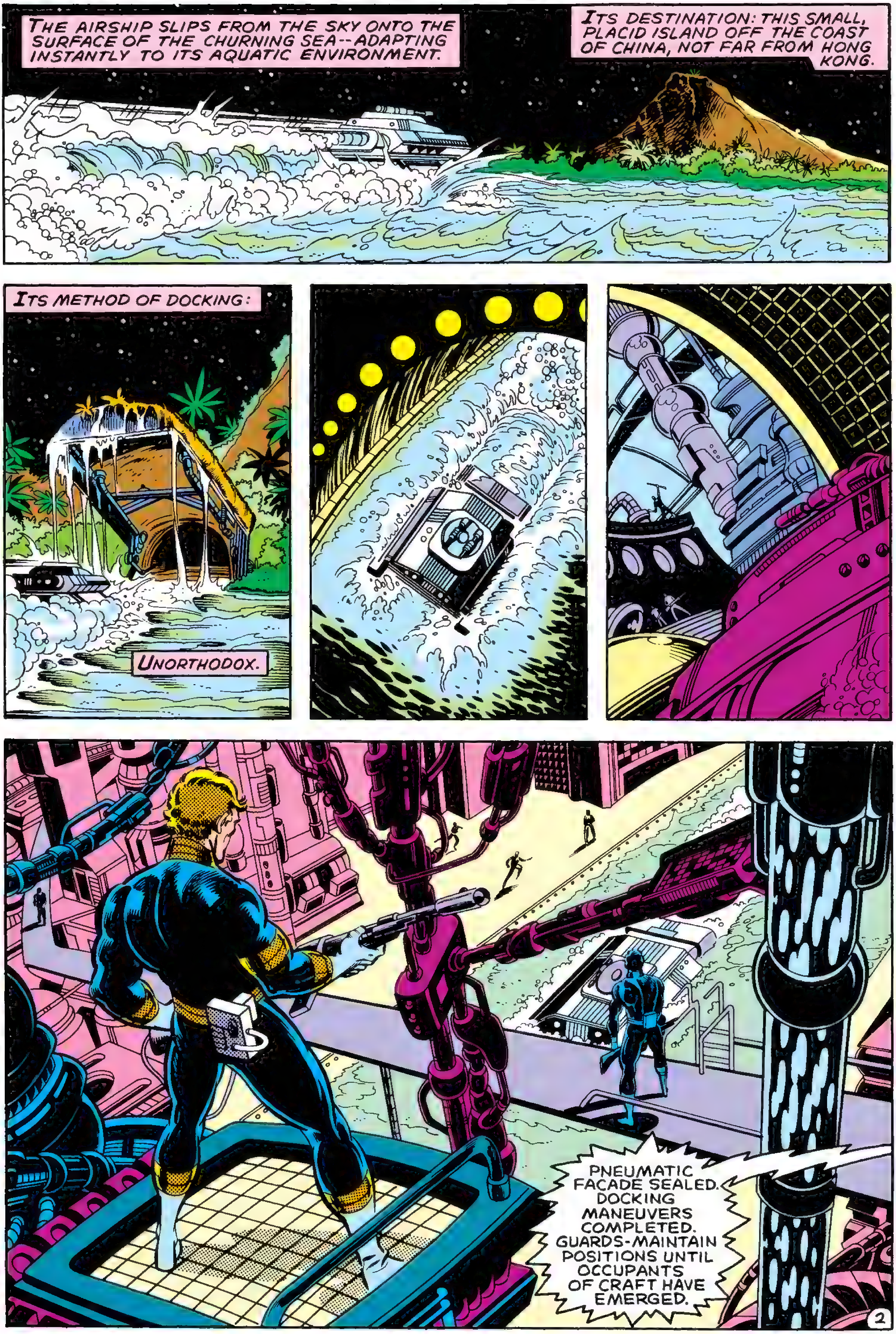
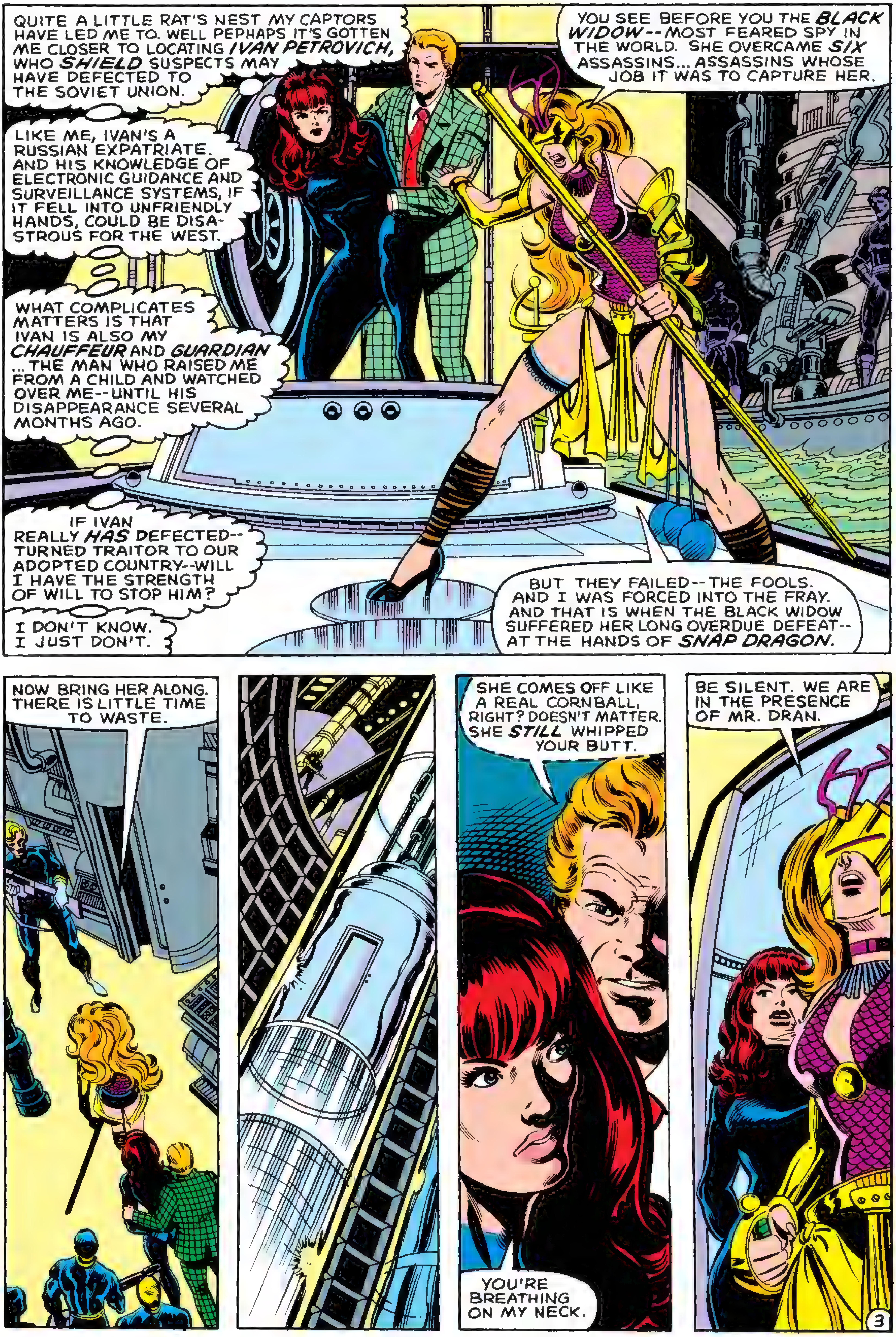
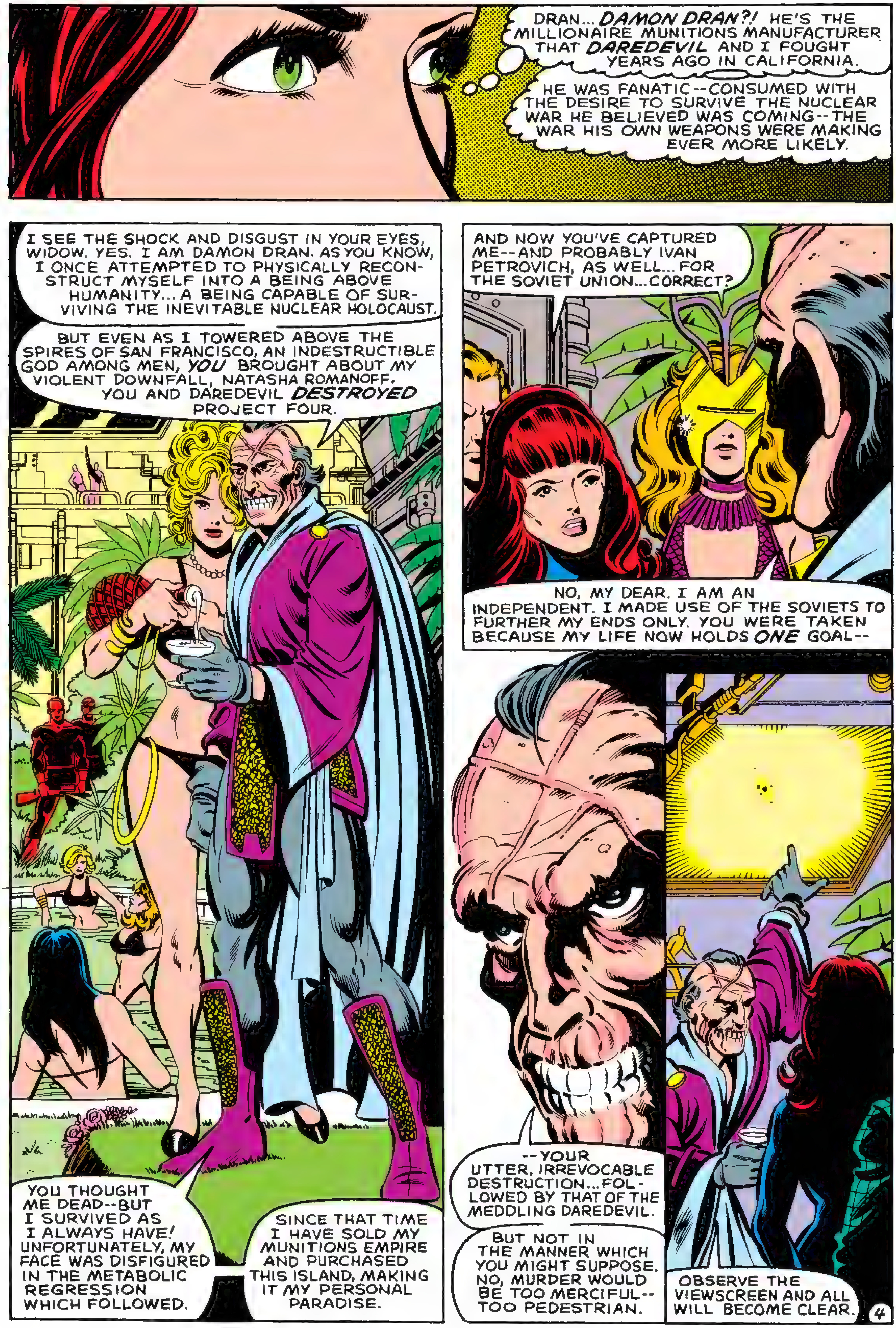
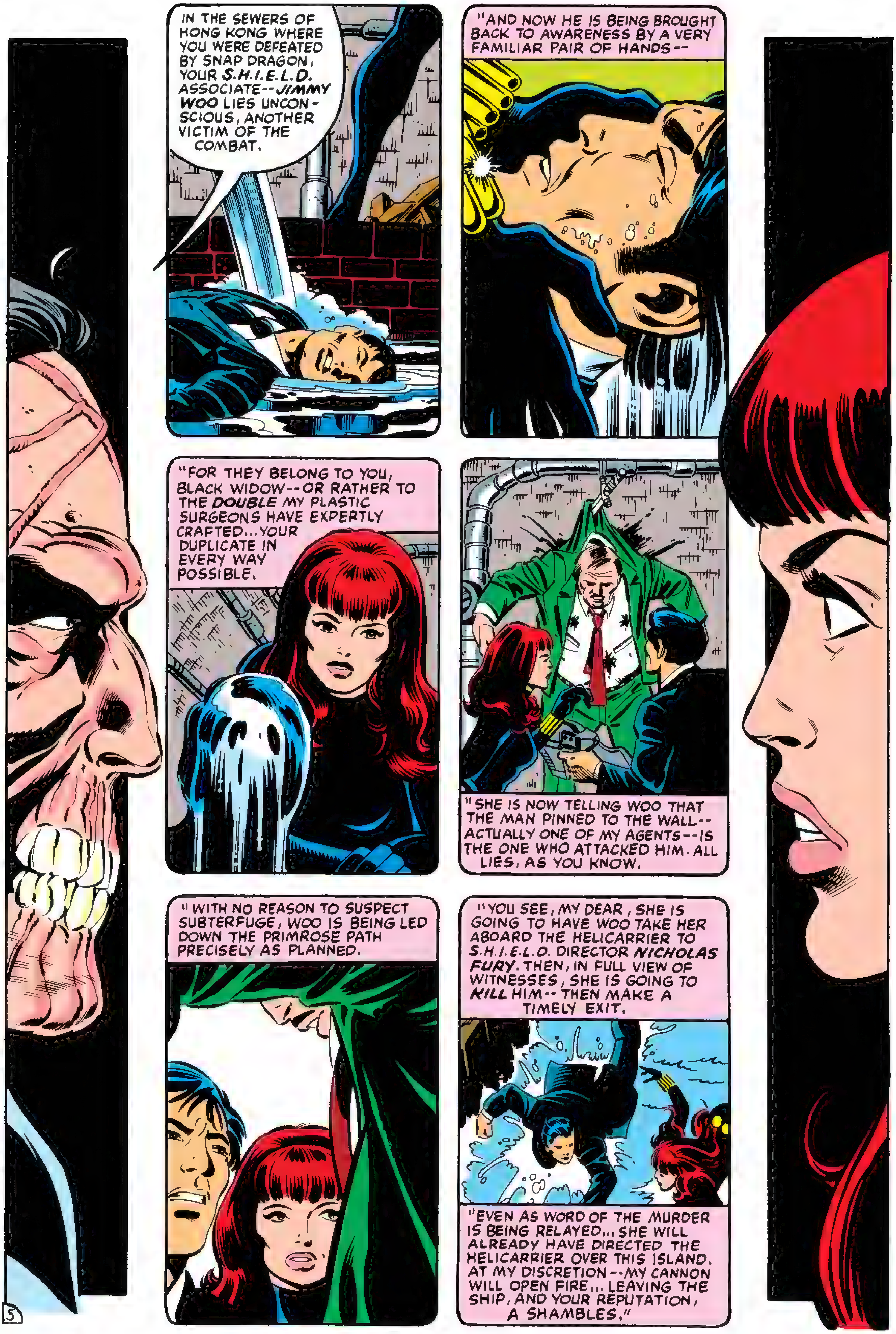
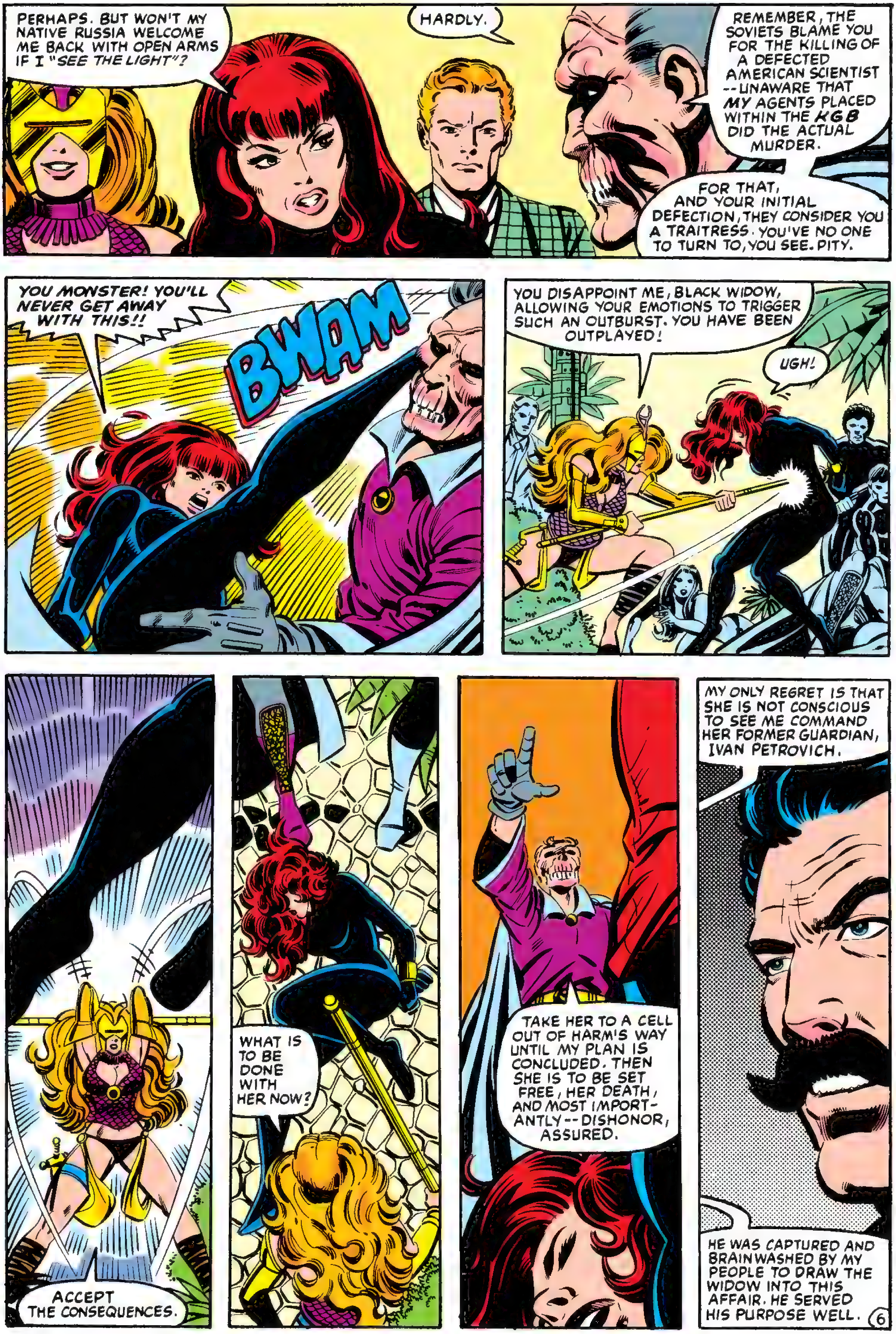
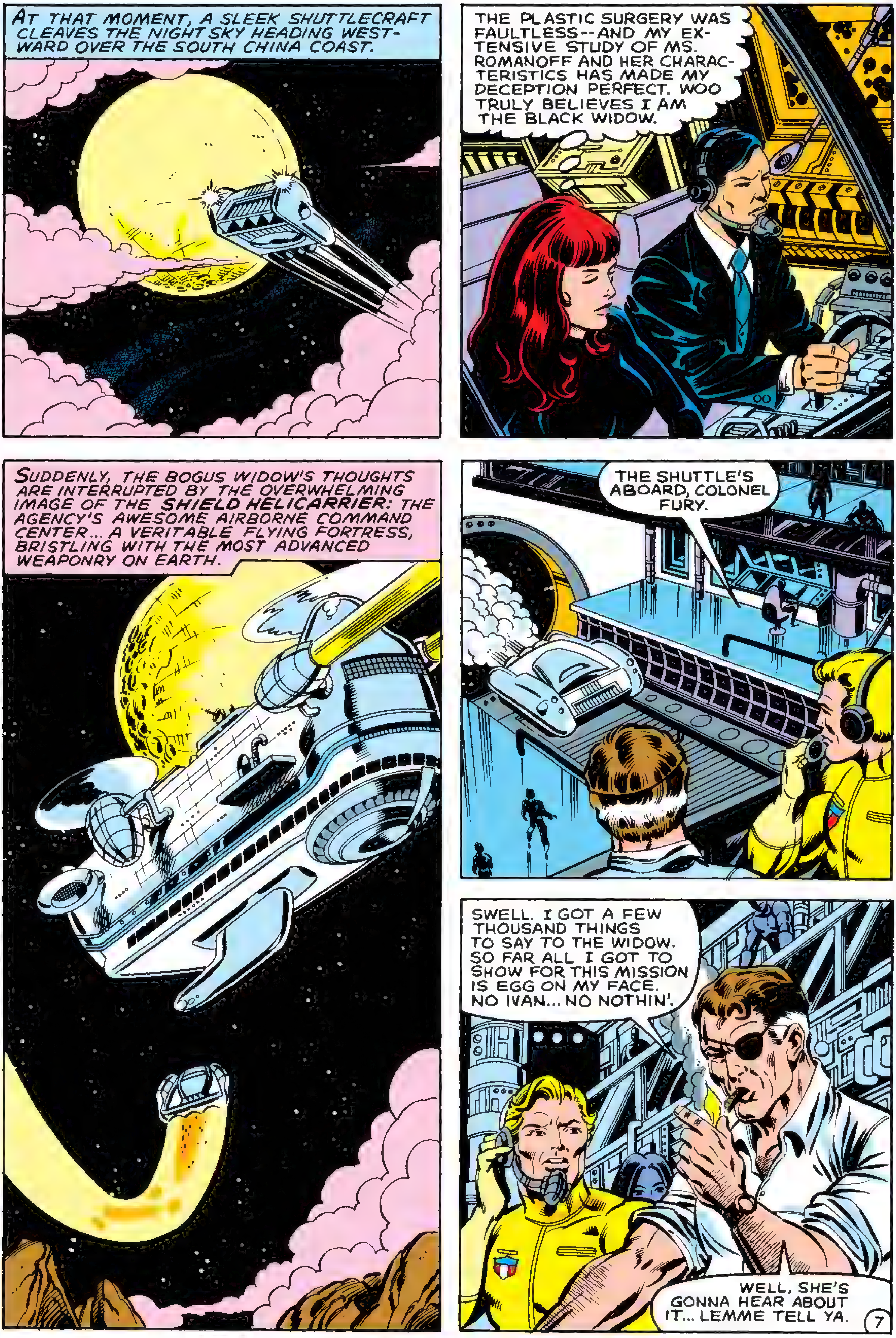

THE AIRSHIP SLIPS FROM THE SKY ONTO THE SURFACE OF THE CHURNING SEA--ADAPTING INSTANTLY TO ITS AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT.
ITS DESTINATION: THIS SMALL, PLACID ISLAND OFF THE COAST OF CHINA, NOT FAR FROM HONG KONG.
ITS METHOD OF DOCKING:
UNORTHODOX.
PNEUMATIC FACADE SEALED. DOCKING MANEUVERS COMPLETED. GUARDS-MAINTAIN POSITIONS UNTIL OCCUPANTS OF CRAFT HAVE EMERGED.

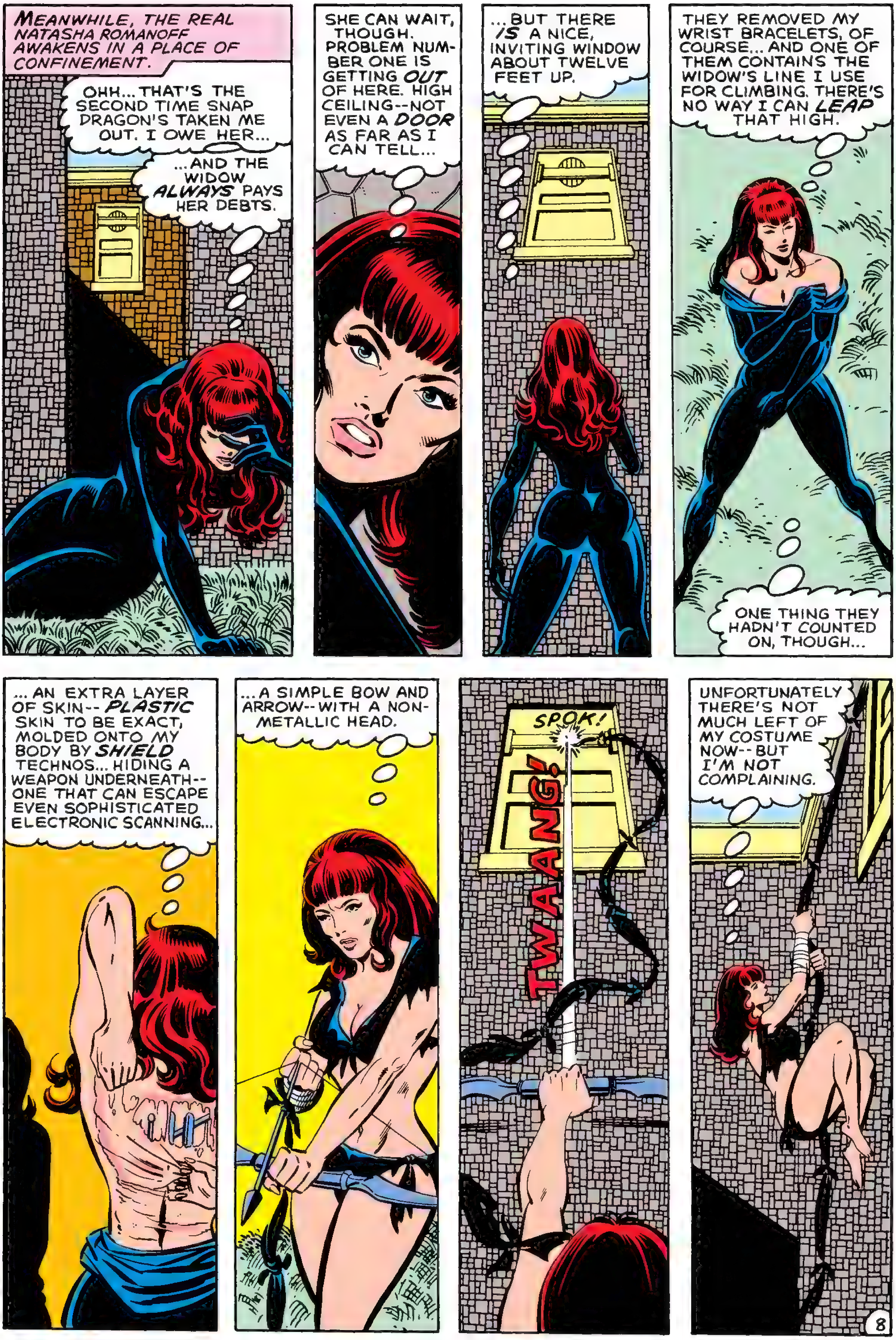

QUITE A LITTLE RAT'S NEST MY CAPTORS HAVE LED ME TO. WELL PEPHAPS IT'S GOTTEN ME CLOSER TO LOCATING *IVAN PETROVICH,* WHO *SHIELD* SUSPECTS MAY HAVE DEFECTED TO THE SOVIET UNION.
LIKE ME, IVAN'S A RUSSIAN EXPATRIATE. AND HIS KNOWLEDGE OF ELECTRONIC GUIDANCE AND SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS, IF IT FELL INTO UNFRIENDLY HANDS, COULD BE DISASTROUS FOR THE WEST.
WHAT COMPLICATES MATTERS IS THAT IVAN IS ALSO MY *CHAUFFEUR* AND *GUARDIAN* ...THE MAN WHO RAISED ME FROM A CHILD AND WATCHED OVER ME--UNTIL HIS DISAPPEARANCE SEVERAL MONTHS AGO.
IF IVAN REALLY *HAS* DEFECTED--TURNED TRAITOR TO OUR ADOPTED COUNTRY--WILL I HAVE THE STRENGTH OF WILL TO STOP HIM?
I DON'T KNOW. I JUST DON'T.
YOU SEE BEFORE YOU THE *BLACK WIDOW*--MOST FEARED SPY IN THE WORLD. SHE OVERCAME *SIX* ASSASSINS... ASSASSINS WHOSE JOB IT WAS TO CAPTURE HER.
BUT THEY FAILED--THE FOOLS. AND I WAS FORCED INTO THE FRAY. AND THAT IS WHEN THE BLACK WIDOW SUFFERED HER LONG OVERDUE DEFEAT--AT THE HANDS OF *SNAP DRAGON.*
NOW BRING HER ALONG. THERE IS LITTLE TIME TO WASTE.
SHE COMES OFF LIKE A REAL CORNBALL, RIGHT? DOESN'T MATTER. SHE *STILL* WHIPPED YOUR BUTT.
YOU'RE BREATHING ON MY NECK.
BE SILENT. WE ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF MR. DRAN.

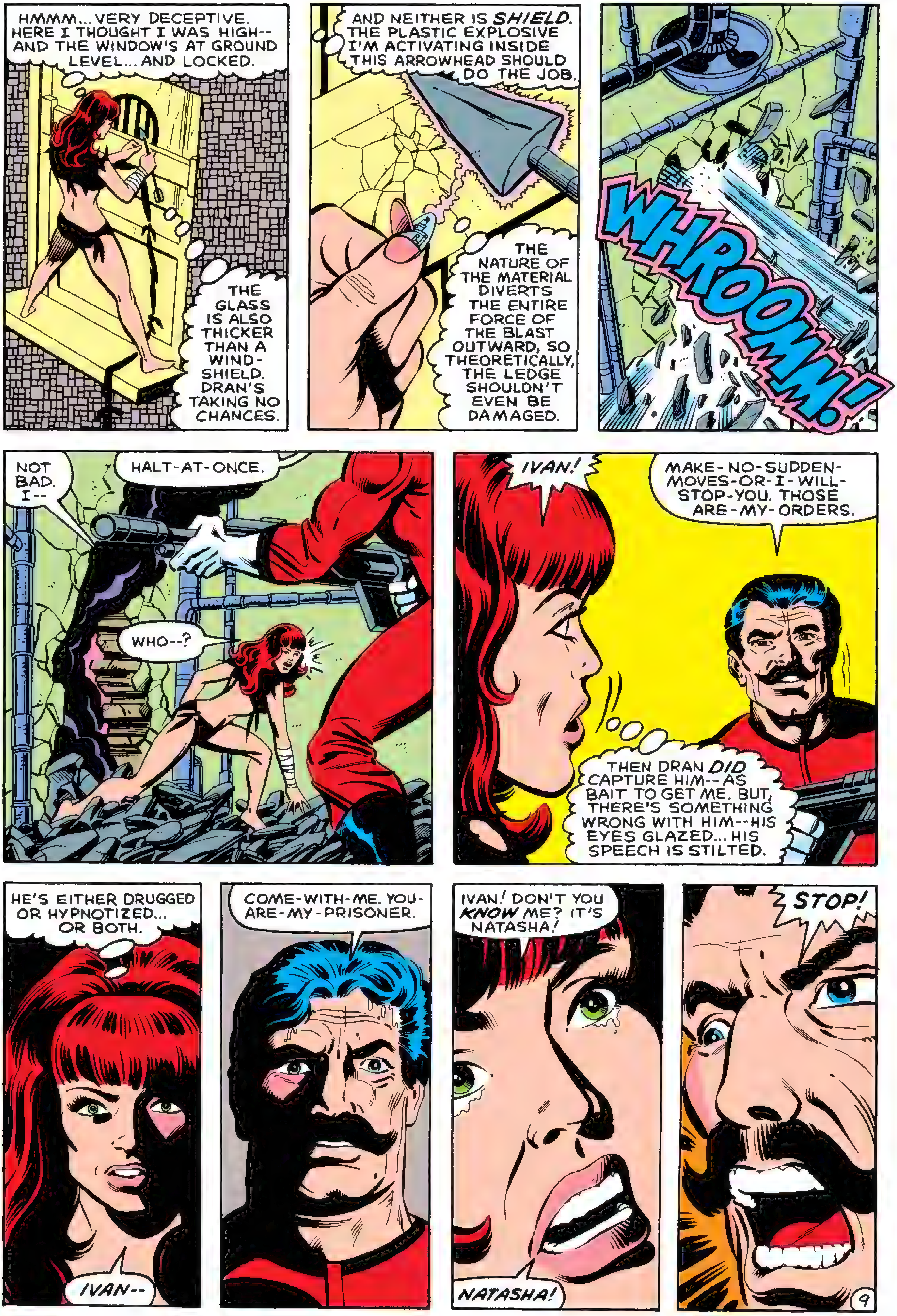

DRAN... *DAMON DRAN?!* HE'S THE MILLIONAIRE MUNITIONS MANUFACTURER THAT *DAREDEVIL* AND I FOUGHT YEARS AGO IN CALIFORNIA.
HE WAS FANATIC--CONSUMED WITH THE DESIRE TO SURVIVE THE NUCLEAR WAR HE BELIEVED WAS COMING--THE WAR HIS OWN WEAPONS WERE MAKING EVER MORE LIKELY.
I SEE THE SHOCK AND DISGUST IN YOUR EYES, WIDOW. YES. I AM DAMON DRAN. AS YOU KNOW, I ONCE ATTEMPTED TO PHYSICALLY RECONSTRUCT MYSELF INTO A BEING ABOVE HUMANITY... A BEING CAPABLE OF SURVIVING THE INEVITABLE NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST.
BUT EVEN AS I TOWERED ABOVE THE SPIRES OF SAN FRANCISCO, AN INDESTRUCTIBLE GOD AMONG MEN, *YOU* BROUGHT ABOUT MY VIOLENT DOWNFALL, NATASHA ROMANOFF. YOU AND DAREDEVIL *DESTROYED* PROJECT FOUR.
YOU THOUGHT ME DEAD--BUT I SURVIVED AS I ALWAYS HAVE! UNFORTUNATELY, MY FACE WAS DISFIGURED IN THE METABOLIC REGRESSION WHICH FOLLOWED.
SINCE THAT TIME I HAVE SOLD MY MUNITIONS EMPIRE AND PURCHASED THIS ISLAND, MAKING IT *MY* PERSONAL PARADISE.
AND NOW YOU'VE CAPTURED ME--AND PROBABLY IVAN PETROVICH, AS WELL... FOR THE SOVIET UNION... CORRECT?
NO, MY DEAR. I AM AN INDEPENDENT. I MADE USE OF THE SOVIETS TO FURTHER MY ENDS ONLY. YOU WERE TAKEN BECAUSE MY LIFE NOW HOLDS *ONE* GOAL--
--YOUR UTTER, IRREVOCABLE DESTRUCTION... FOLLOWED BY THAT OF THE MEDDLING DAREDEVIL.
BUT NOT IN THE MANNER WHICH YOU MIGHT SUPPOSE. NO, MURDER WOULD BE TOO MERCIFUL--TOO PEDESTRIAN.
OBSERVE THE VIEWSCREEN AND ALL WILL BECOME CLEAR.

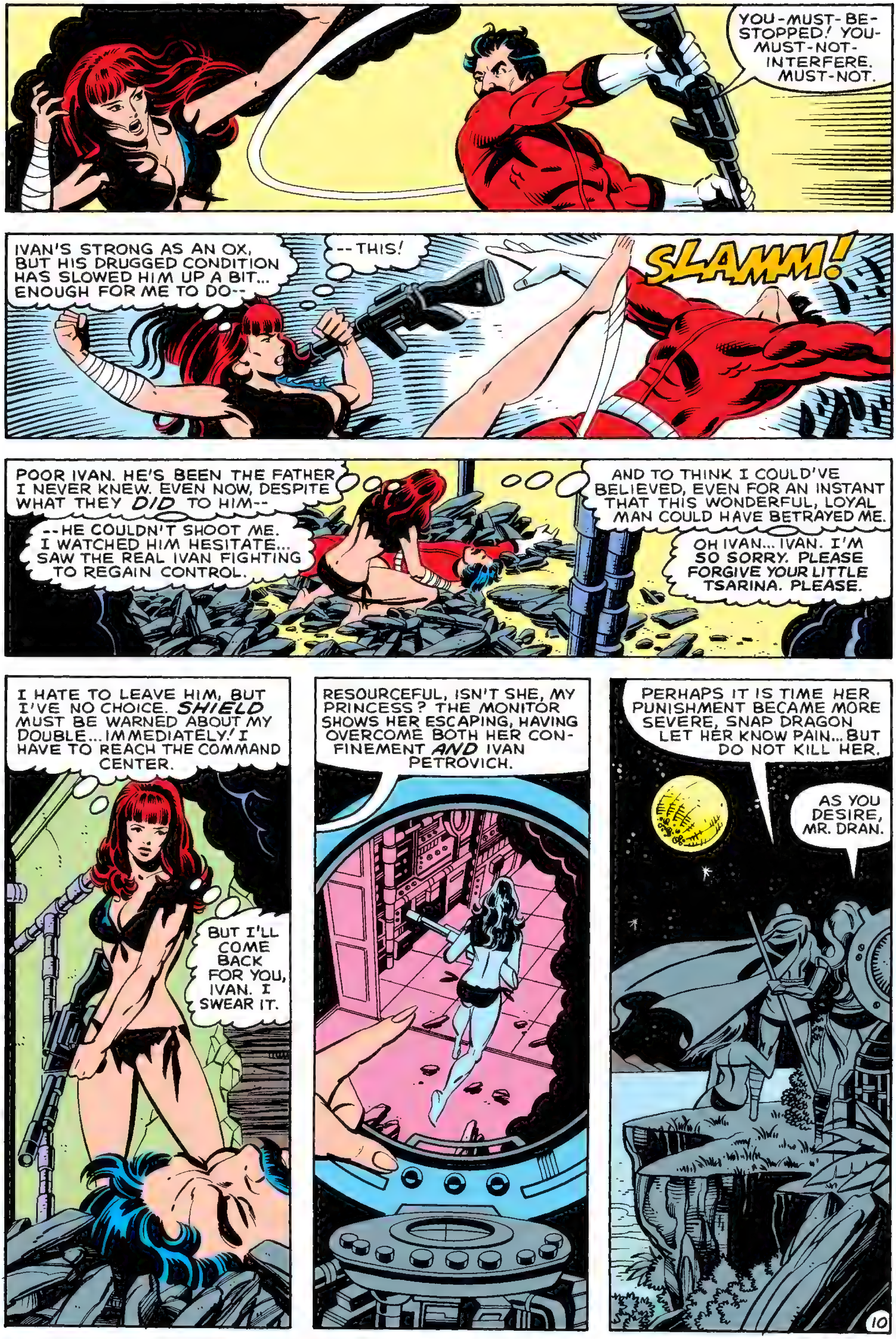

IN THE SEWERS OF HONG KONG WHERE YOU WERE DEFEATED BY SNAP DRAGON, YOUR *S.H.I.E.L.D.* ASSOCIATE--*JIMMY WOO* LIES UNCONSCIOUS, ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE COMBAT.
"AND NOW HE IS BEING BROUGHT BACK TO AWARENESS BY A VERY FAMILIAR PAIR OF HANDS--
"FOR THEY BELONG TO YOU, BLACK WIDOW--OR RATHER TO THE *DOUBLE* MY PLASTIC SURGEONS HAVE EXPERTLY CRAFTED...YOUR DUPLICATE IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE.
"SHE IS NOW TELLING WOO THAT THE MAN PINNED TO THE WALL--ACTUALLY ONE OF MY AGENTS--IS THE ONE WHO ATTACKED HIM. ALL LIES, AS YOU KNOW.
"WITH NO REASON TO SUSPECT SUBTERFUGE, WOO IS BEING LED DOWN THE PRIMROSE PATH PRECISELY AS PLANNED.
"YOU SEE, MY DEAR, SHE IS GOING TO HAVE WOO TAKE HER ABOARD THE HELICARRIER TO S.H.I.E.L.D. DIRECTOR *NICHOLAS FURY*. THEN, IN FULL VIEW OF WITNESSES, SHE IS GOING TO *KILL* HIM--THEN MAKE A TIMELY EXIT.
"EVEN AS WORD OF THE MURDER IS BEING RELAYED... SHE WILL ALREADY HAVE DIRECTED THE HELICARRIER OVER THIS ISLAND. AT MY DISCRETION--MY CANNON WILL OPEN FIRE... LEAVING THE SHIP, AND YOUR REPUTATION, A SHAMBLES."

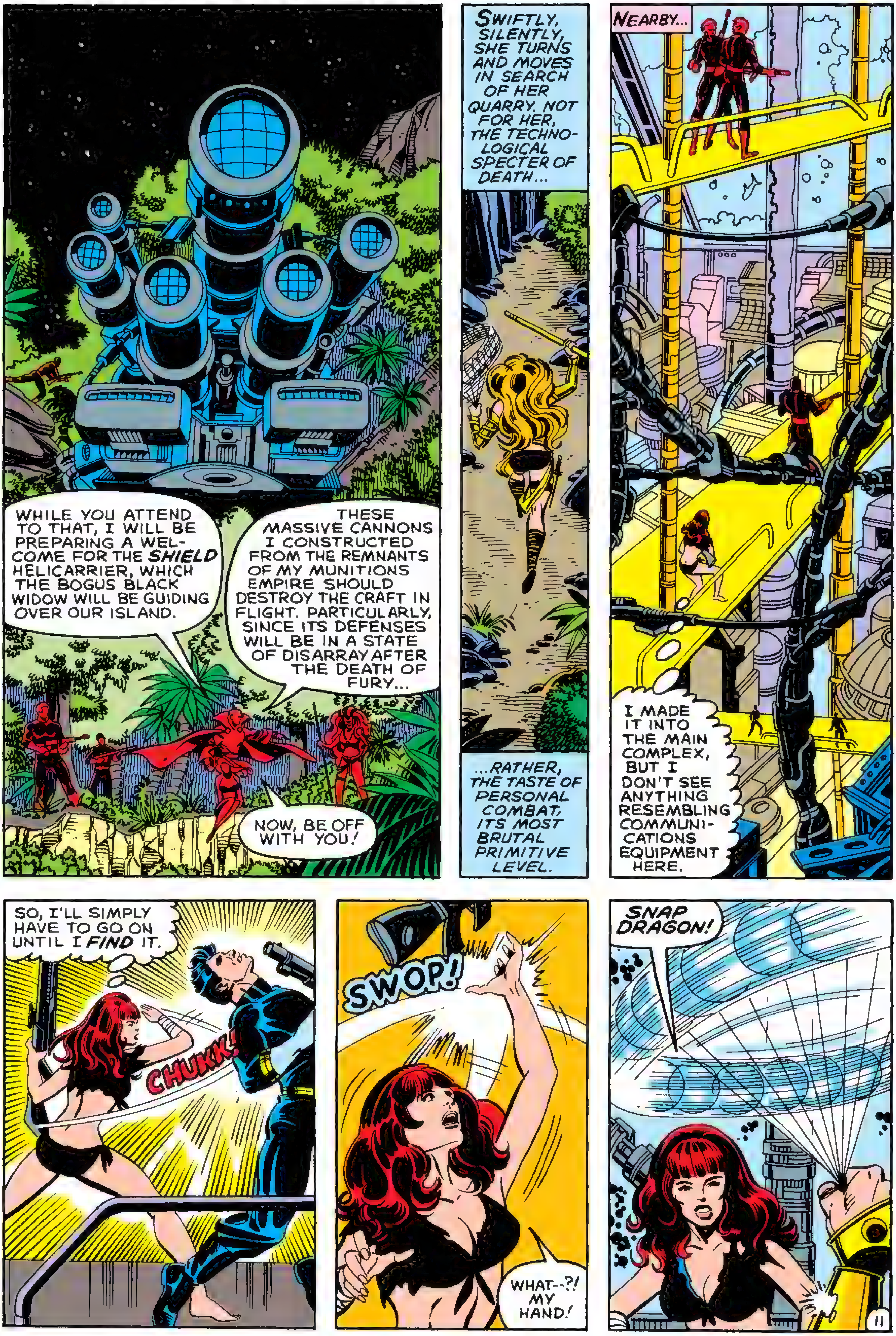

PERHAPS. BUT WON'T MY NATIVE RUSSIA WELCOME ME BACK WITH OPEN ARMS IF I "SEE THE LIGHT"?
HARDLY.
REMEMBER, THE SOVIETS BLAME YOU FOR THE KILLING OF A DEFECTED AMERICAN SCIENTIST -- UNAWARE THAT MY AGENTS PLACED WITHIN THE KGB DID THE ACTUAL MURDER.
FOR THAT, AND YOUR INITIAL DEFECTION, THEY CONSIDER YOU A TRAITRESS. YOU'VE NO ONE TO TURN TO, YOU SEE. PITY.
YOU MONSTER! YOU'LL NEVER GET AWAY WITH THIS!!
BWAM
YOU DISAPPOINT ME, BLACK WIDOW, ALLOWING YOUR EMOTIONS TO TRIGGER SUCH AN OUTBURST. YOU HAVE BEEN OUTPLAYED!
UGH!
ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES.
WHAT IS TO BE DONE WITH HER NOW?
TAKE HER TO A CELL OUT OF HARM'S WAY UNTIL MY PLAN IS CONCLUDED. THEN SHE IS TO BE SET FREE, HER DEATH, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY -- DISHONOR, ASSURED.
MY ONLY REGRET IS THAT SHE IS NOT CONSCIOUS TO SEE ME COMMAND HER FORMER GUARDIAN, IVAN PETROVICH.
HE WAS CAPTURED AND BRAINWASHED BY MY PEOPLE TO DRAW THE WIDOW INTO THIS AFFAIR. HE SERVED HIS PURPOSE WELL.

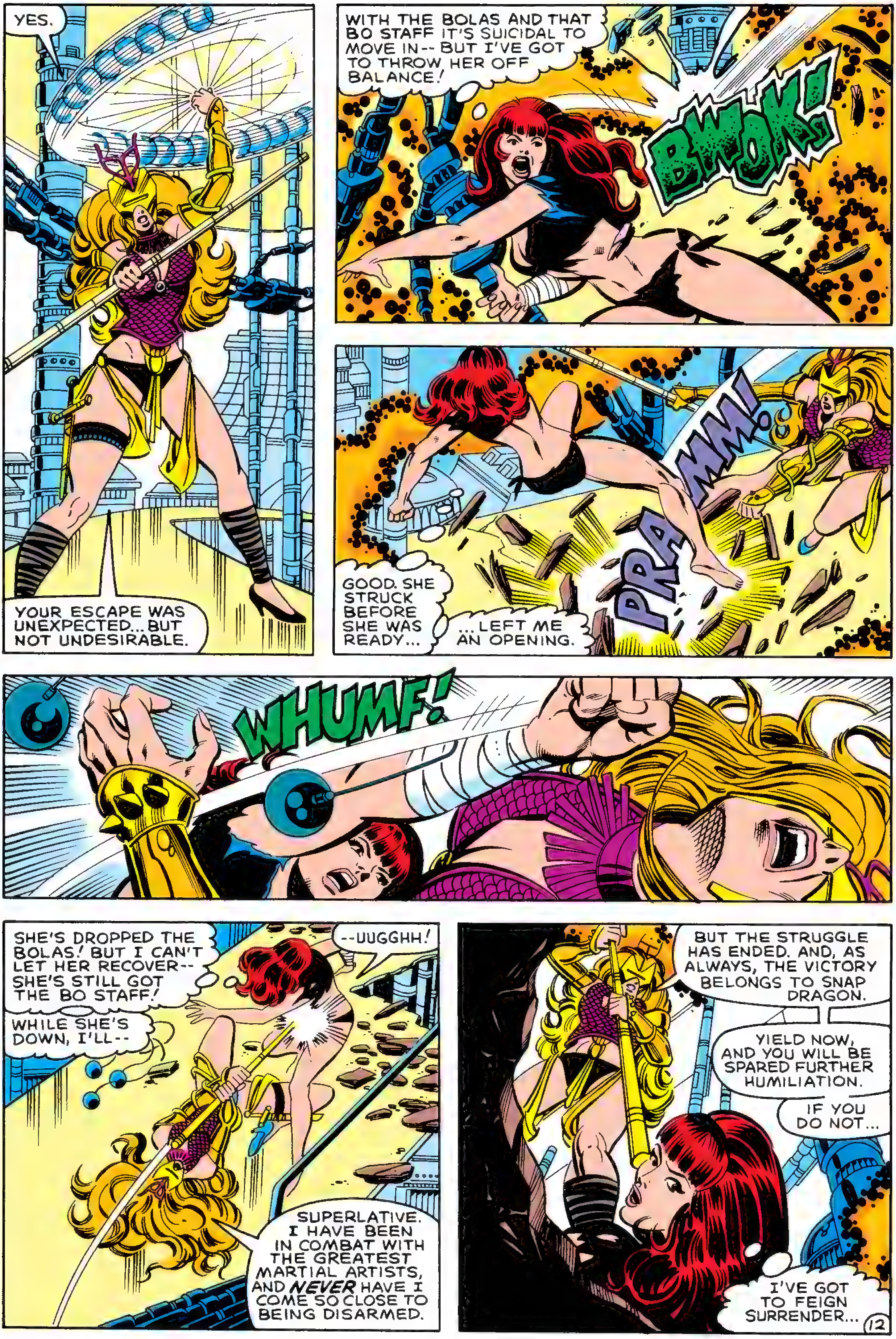

AT THAT MOMENT, A SLEEK SHUTTLECRAFT CLEAVES THE NIGHT SKY HEADING WESTWARD OVER THE SOUTH CHINA COAST.
THE PLASTIC SURGERY WAS FAULTLESS--AND MY EXTENSIVE STUDY OF MS. ROMANOFF AND HER CHARACTERISTICS HAS MADE MY DECEPTION PERFECT. WOO TRULY BELIEVES I AM THE BLACK WIDOW.
SUDDENLY, THE BOGUS WIDOW'S THOUGHTS ARE INTERRUPTED BY THE OVERWHELMING IMAGE OF THE **SHIELD HELICARRIER**: THE AGENCY'S AWESOME AIRBORNE COMMAND CENTER... A VERITABLE FLYING FORTRESS, BRISTLING WITH THE MOST ADVANCED WEAPONRY ON EARTH.
THE SHUTTLE'S ABOARD, COLONEL FURY.
SWELL. I GOT A FEW THOUSAND THINGS TO SAY TO THE WIDOW. SO FAR ALL I GOT TO SHOW FOR THIS MISSION IS EGG ON MY FACE. NO IVAN... NO NOTHIN'.
WELL, SHE'S GONNA HEAR ABOUT IT... LEMME TELL YA.

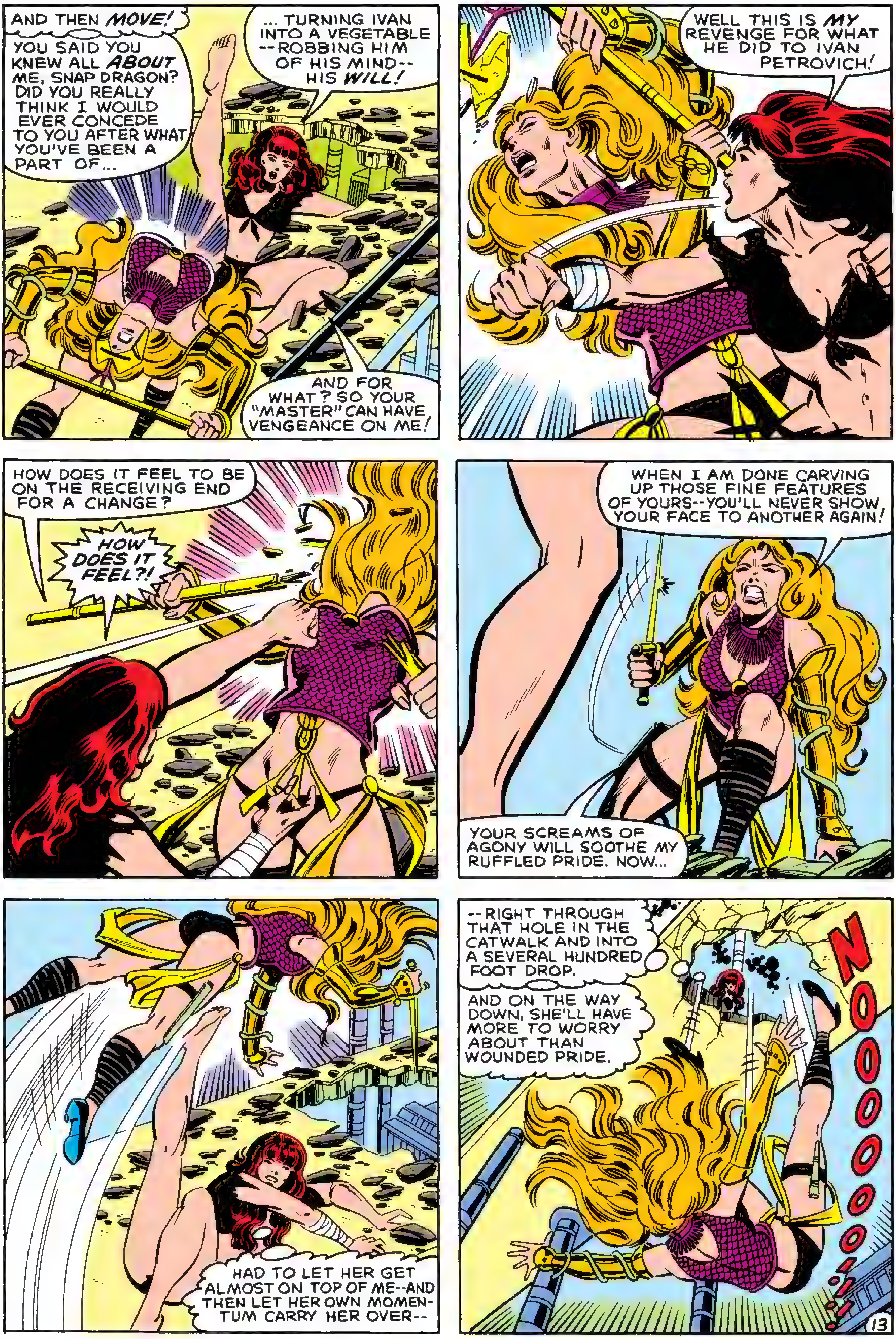

MEANWHILE, THE REAL NATASHA ROMANOFF AWAKENS IN A PLACE OF CONFINEMENT.
OHH... THAT'S THE SECOND TIME SNAP DRAGON'S TAKEN ME OUT. I OWE HER...
...AND THE WIDOW ALWAYS PAYS HER DEBTS.
SHE CAN WAIT, THOUGH. PROBLEM NUMBER ONE IS GETTING OUT OF HERE. HIGH CEILING--NOT EVEN A DOOR AS FAR AS I CAN TELL...
...BUT THERE IS A NICE, INVITING WINDOW ABOUT TWELVE FEET UP.
THEY REMOVED MY WRIST BRACELETS, OF COURSE... AND ONE OF THEM CONTAINS THE WIDOW'S LINE I USE FOR CLIMBING. THERE'S NO WAY I CAN LEAP THAT HIGH.
ONE THING THEY HADN'T COUNTED ON, THOUGH...
... AN EXTRA LAYER OF SKIN-- PLASTIC SKIN TO BE EXACT, MOLDED ONTO MY BODY BY SHIELD TECHNOS... HIDING A WEAPON UNDERNEATH-- ONE THAT CAN ESCAPE EVEN SOPHISTICATED ELECTRONIC SCANNING...
...A SIMPLE BOW AND ARROW--WITH A NON-METALLIC HEAD.
SPOK!
TWAAANG!
UNFORTUNATELY THERE'S NOT MUCH LEFT OF MY COSTUME NOW--BUT I'M NOT COMPLAINING.

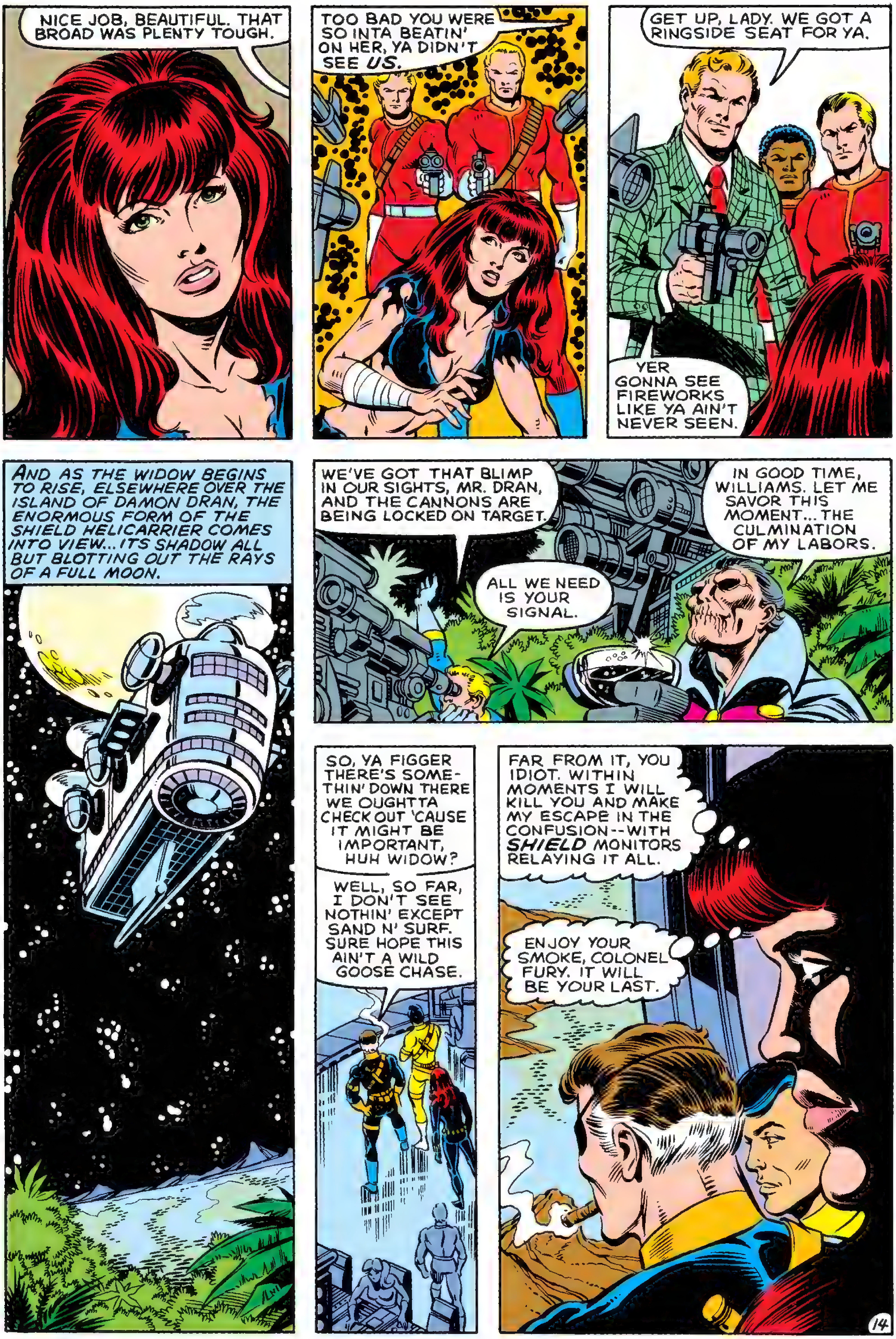

HMMM... VERY DECEPTIVE. HERE I THOUGHT I WAS HIGH-- AND THE WINDOW'S AT GROUND LEVEL... AND LOCKED.
THE GLASS IS ALSO THICKER THAN A WINDSHIELD. DRAN'S TAKING NO CHANCES.
AND NEITHER IS *SHIELD*. THE PLASTIC EXPLOSIVE I'M ACTIVATING INSIDE THIS ARROWHEAD SHOULD DO THE JOB.
THE NATURE OF THE MATERIAL DIVERTS THE ENTIRE FORCE OF THE BLAST OUTWARD, SO THEORETICALLY, THE LEDGE SHOULDN'T EVEN BE DAMAGED.
WHROOMM!
NOT BAD. I--
HALT-AT-ONCE.
WHO--?
IVAN!
MAKE-NO-SUDDEN-MOVES-OR-I-WILL-STOP-YOU. THOSE ARE-MY-ORDERS.
THEN DRAN *DID* CAPTURE HIM--AS BAIT TO GET ME. BUT, THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH HIM--HIS EYES GLAZED... HIS SPEECH IS STILTED.
HE'S EITHER DRUGGED OR HYPNOTIZED... OR BOTH.
IVAN--
COME-WITH-ME. YOU-ARE-MY-PRISONER.
IVAN! DON'T YOU *KNOW* ME? IT'S NATASHA!
NATASHA!
STOP!

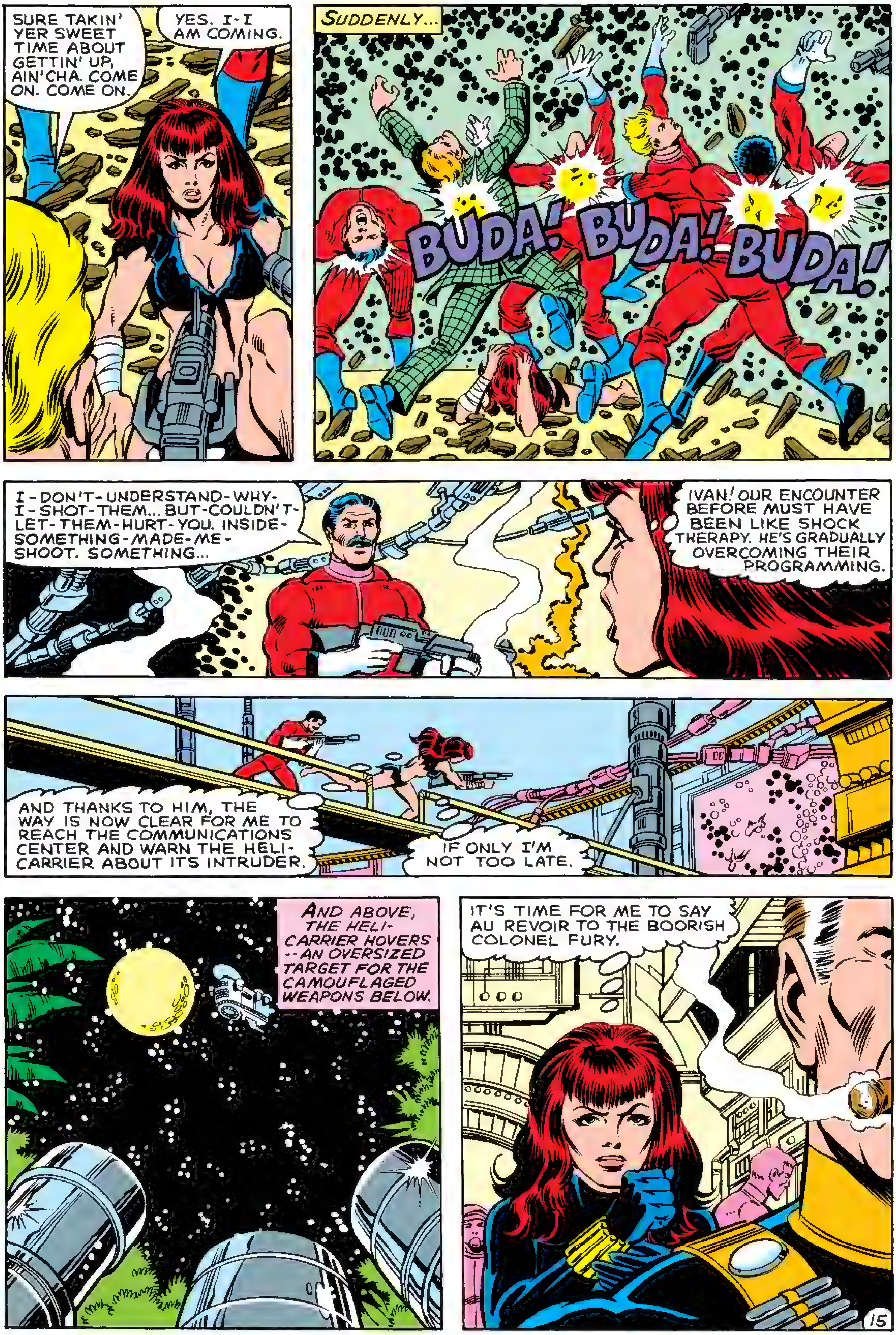

YOU-MUST-BE-STOPPED! YOU-MUST-NOT-INTERFERE. MUST-NOT.
IVAN'S STRONG AS AN OX, BUT HIS DRUGGED CONDITION HAS SLOWED HIM UP A BIT... ENOUGH FOR ME TO DO--
--THIS!
SLAMM!
POOR IVAN. HE'S BEEN THE FATHER I NEVER KNEW. EVEN NOW, DESPITE WHAT THEY *DID* TO HIM--
--HE COULDN'T SHOOT ME. I WATCHED HIM HESITATE... SAW THE REAL IVAN FIGHTING TO REGAIN CONTROL.
AND TO THINK I COULD'VE BELIEVED, EVEN FOR AN INSTANT THAT THIS WONDERFUL, LOYAL MAN COULD HAVE BETRAYED ME.
OH IVAN... IVAN. I'M SO SORRY. PLEASE FORGIVE *YOUR* LITTLE TSARINA. PLEASE.
I HATE TO LEAVE HIM, BUT I'VE NO CHOICE. ***SHIELD*** MUST BE WARNED ABOUT MY DOUBLE... IMMEDIATELY! I HAVE TO REACH THE COMMAND CENTER.
BUT I'LL COME BACK FOR YOU, IVAN. I SWEAR IT.
RESOURCEFUL, ISN'T SHE, MY PRINCESS? THE MONITOR SHOWS HER ESCAPING, HAVING OVERCOME BOTH HER CONFINEMENT ***AND*** IVAN PETROVICH.
PERHAPS IT IS TIME HER PUNISHMENT BECAME MORE SEVERE, SNAP DRAGON. LET HER KNOW PAIN... BUT DO NOT KILL HER.
AS YOU DESIRE, MR. DRAN.

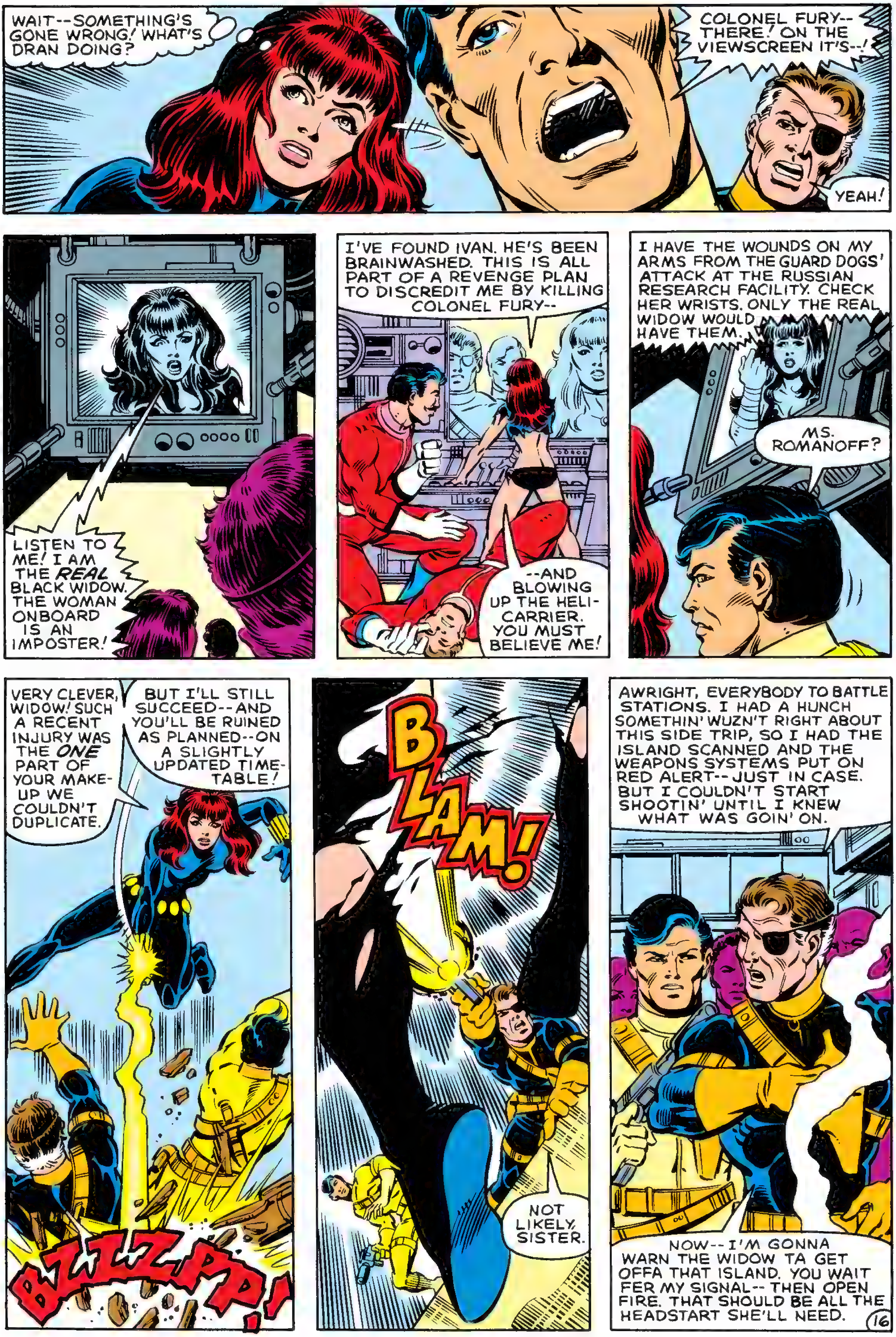

WHILE YOU ATTEND TO THAT, I WILL BE PREPARING A WELCOME FOR THE *SHIELD* HELICARRIER, WHICH THE BOGUS BLACK WIDOW WILL BE GUIDING OVER OUR ISLAND.
THESE MASSIVE CANNONS I CONSTRUCTED FROM THE REMNANTS OF MY MUNITIONS EMPIRE SHOULD DESTROY THE CRAFT IN FLIGHT. PARTICULARLY, SINCE ITS DEFENSES WILL BE IN A STATE OF DISARRAY AFTER THE DEATH OF FURY...
NOW, BE OFF WITH YOU!
SWIFTLY, SILENTLY, SHE TURNS AND MOVES IN SEARCH OF HER QUARRY. NOT FOR HER, THE TECHNOLOGICAL SPECTER OF DEATH...
...RATHER, THE TASTE OF PERSONAL COMBAT, ITS MOST BRUTAL PRIMITIVE LEVEL.
NEARBY...
I MADE IT INTO THE MAIN COMPLEX, BUT I DON'T SEE ANYTHING RESEMBLING COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT HERE.
SO, I'LL SIMPLY HAVE TO GO ON UNTIL I *FIND* IT.
CHUKK!
SWOP!
WHAT--?! MY HAND!
SNAP DRAGON!

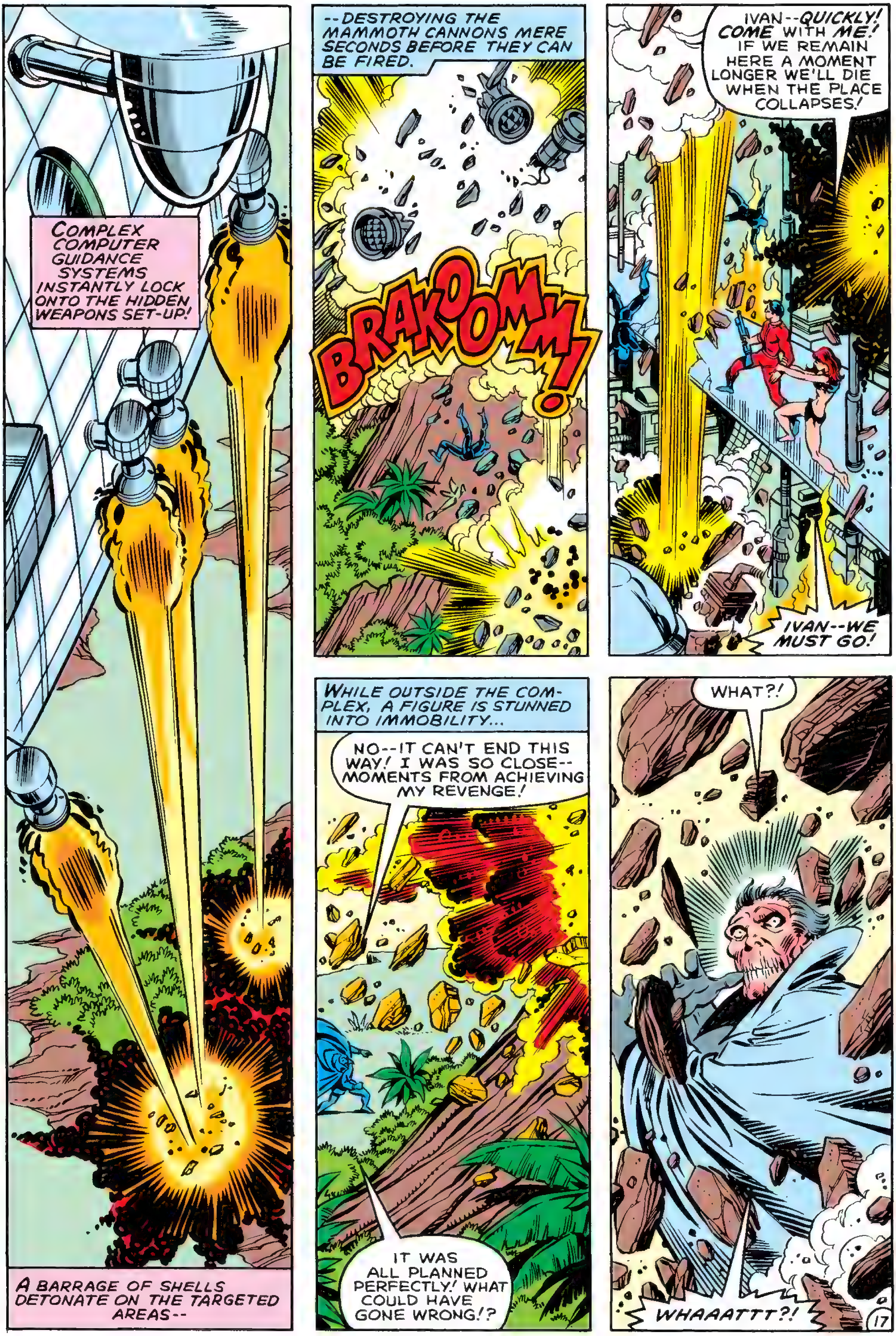

YES.
YOUR ESCAPE WAS UNEXPECTED...BUT NOT UNDESIRABLE.
WITH THE BOLAS AND THAT BO STAFF IT'S SUICIDAL TO MOVE IN-- BUT I'VE GOT TO THROW HER OFF BALANCE!
BWOK!
PRAMM!
GOOD. SHE STRUCK BEFORE SHE WAS READY...
...LEFT ME AN OPENING.
WHUMF!
SHE'S DROPPED THE BOLAS! BUT I CAN'T LET HER RECOVER-- SHE'S STILL GOT THE BO STAFF!
WHILE SHE'S DOWN, I'LL--
--UUGGHH!
SUPERLATIVE. I HAVE BEEN IN COMBAT WITH THE GREATEST MARTIAL ARTISTS, AND *NEVER* HAVE I COME SO CLOSE TO BEING DISARMED.
BUT THE STRUGGLE HAS ENDED. AND, AS ALWAYS, THE VICTORY BELONGS TO SNAP DRAGON.
YIELD NOW, AND YOU WILL BE SPARED FURTHER HUMILIATION.
IF YOU DO NOT...
I'VE GOT TO FEIGN SURRENDER...

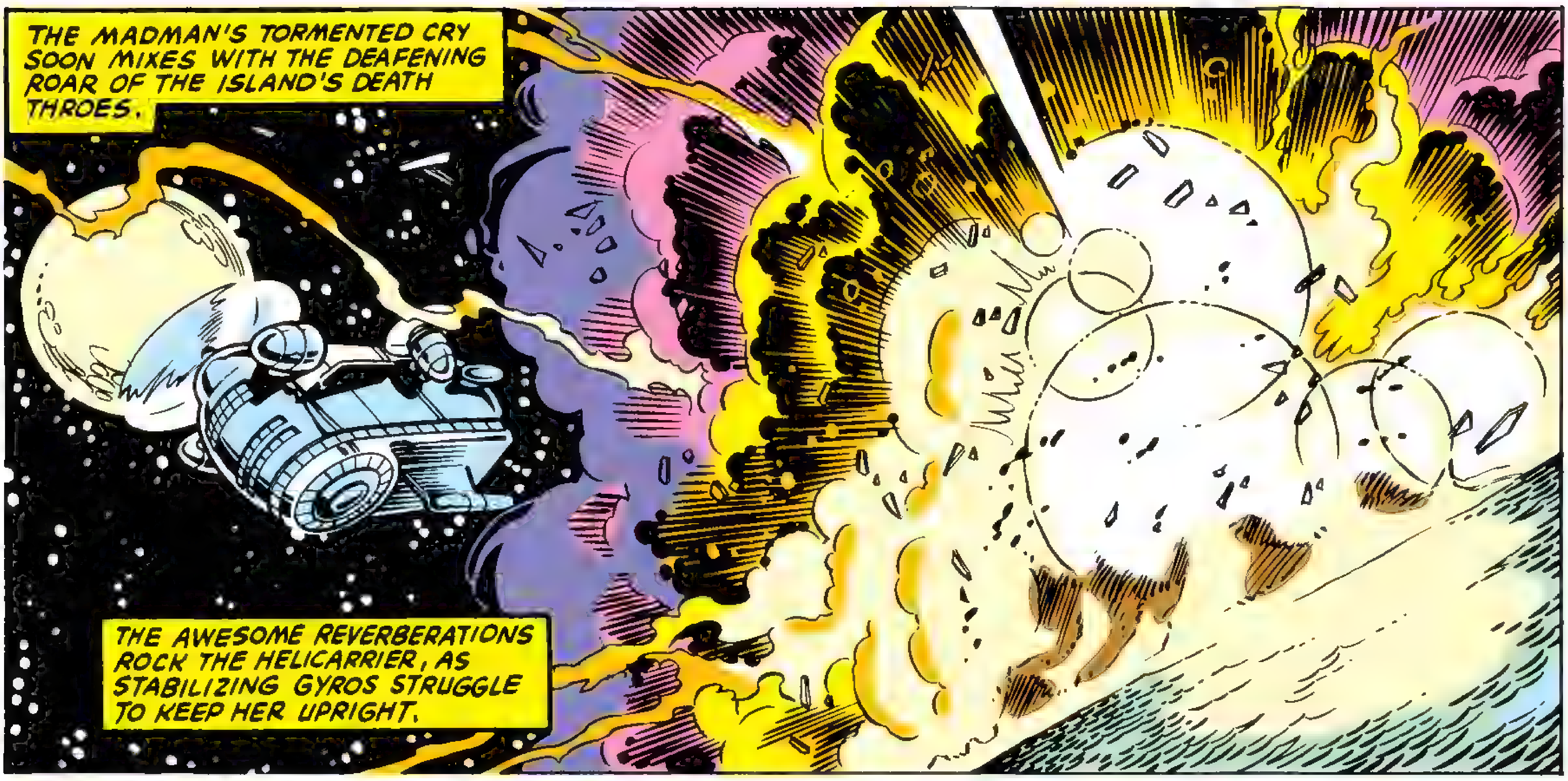

AND THEN *MOVE!*
YOU SAID YOU KNEW ALL *ABOUT* ME, SNAP DRAGON? DID YOU REALLY THINK I WOULD EVER CONCEDE TO YOU AFTER WHAT YOU'VE BEEN A PART OF...
... TURNING IVAN INTO A VEGETABLE --ROBBING HIM OF HIS MIND-- HIS *WILL!*
AND FOR WHAT? SO YOUR "MASTER" CAN HAVE VENGEANCE ON ME!
WELL THIS IS *MY* REVENGE FOR WHAT HE DID TO IVAN PETROVICH!
HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE ON THE RECEIVING END FOR A CHANGE?
HOW DOES IT FEEL?!
WHEN I AM DONE CARVING UP THOSE FINE FEATURES OF YOURS--YOU'LL NEVER SHOW YOUR FACE TO ANOTHER AGAIN!
YOUR SCREAMS OF AGONY WILL SOOTHE MY RUFFLED PRIDE. NOW...
HAD TO LET HER GET ALMOST ON TOP OF ME--AND THEN LET HER OWN MOMENTUM CARRY HER OVER--
--RIGHT THROUGH THAT HOLE IN THE CATWALK AND INTO A SEVERAL HUNDRED FOOT DROP.
AND ON THE WAY DOWN, SHE'LL HAVE MORE TO WORRY ABOUT THAN WOUNDED PRIDE.
NOOOOOOO!!!

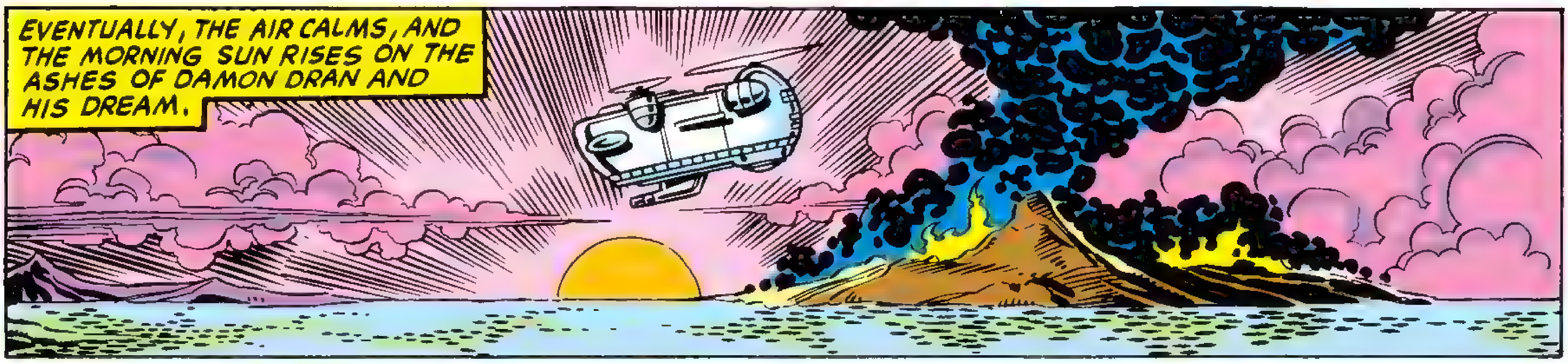

NICE JOB, BEAUTIFUL. THAT BROAD WAS PLENTY TOUGH.
TOO BAD YOU WERE SO INTA BEATIN' ON HER, YA DIDN'T SEE *US*.
GET UP, LADY. WE GOT A RINGSIDE SEAT FOR YA.
YER GONNA SEE FIREWORKS LIKE YA AIN'T NEVER SEEN.
AND AS THE WIDOW BEGINS TO RISE, ELSEWHERE OVER THE ISLAND OF DAMON DRAN, THE ENORMOUS FORM OF THE SHIELD HELICARRIER COMES INTO VIEW... ITS SHADOW ALL BUT BLOTTING OUT THE RAYS OF A FULL MOON.
WE'VE GOT THAT BLIMP IN OUR SIGHTS, MR. DRAN, AND THE CANNONS ARE BEING LOCKED ON TARGET.
ALL WE NEED IS YOUR SIGNAL.
IN GOOD TIME, WILLIAMS. LET ME SAVOR THIS MOMENT... THE CULMINATION OF MY LABORS.
SO, YA FIGGER THERE'S SOMETHIN' DOWN THERE WE OUGHTTA CHECK OUT 'CAUSE IT MIGHT BE IMPORTANT, HUH WIDOW?
WELL, SO FAR, I DON'T SEE NOTHIN' EXCEPT SAND N' SURF. SURE HOPE THIS AIN'T A WILD GOOSE CHASE.
FAR FROM IT, YOU IDIOT. WITHIN MOMENTS I WILL KILL YOU AND MAKE MY ESCAPE IN THE CONFUSION--WITH *SHIELD* MONITORS RELAYING IT ALL.
ENJOY YOUR SMOKE, COLONEL FURY. IT WILL BE YOUR LAST.

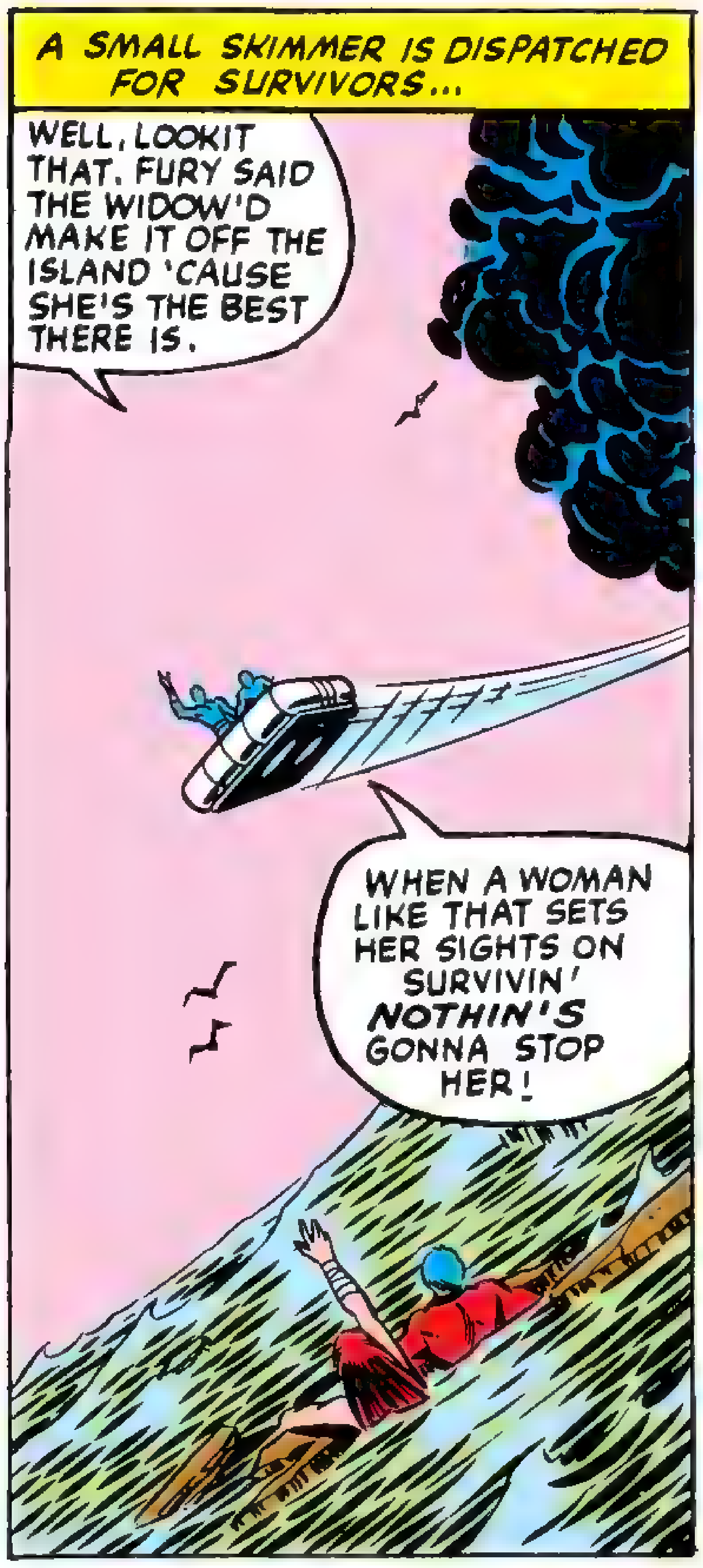

SURE TAKIN' YER SWEET TIME ABOUT GETTIN' UP, AIN'CHA. COME ON. COME ON.
YES. I-I AM COMING.
SUDDENLY...
BUDA! BUDA! BUDA!
I-DON'T-UNDERSTAND-WHY-I-SHOT-THEM... BUT-COULDN'T-LET-THEM-HURT-YOU. INSIDE-SOMETHING-MADE-ME-SHOOT. SOMETHING...
IVAN! OUR ENCOUNTER BEFORE MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE SHOCK THERAPY. HE'S GRADUALLY OVERCOMING THEIR PROGRAMMING.
AND THANKS TO HIM, THE WAY IS NOW CLEAR FOR ME TO REACH THE COMMUNICATIONS CENTER AND WARN THE HELI-CARRIER ABOUT ITS INTRUDER.
IF ONLY I'M NOT TOO LATE.
AND ABOVE, THE HELI-CARRIER HOVERS--AN OVERSIZED TARGET FOR THE CAMOUFLAGED WEAPONS BELOW.
IT'S TIME FOR ME TO SAY AU REVOIR TO THE BOORISH COLONEL FURY.

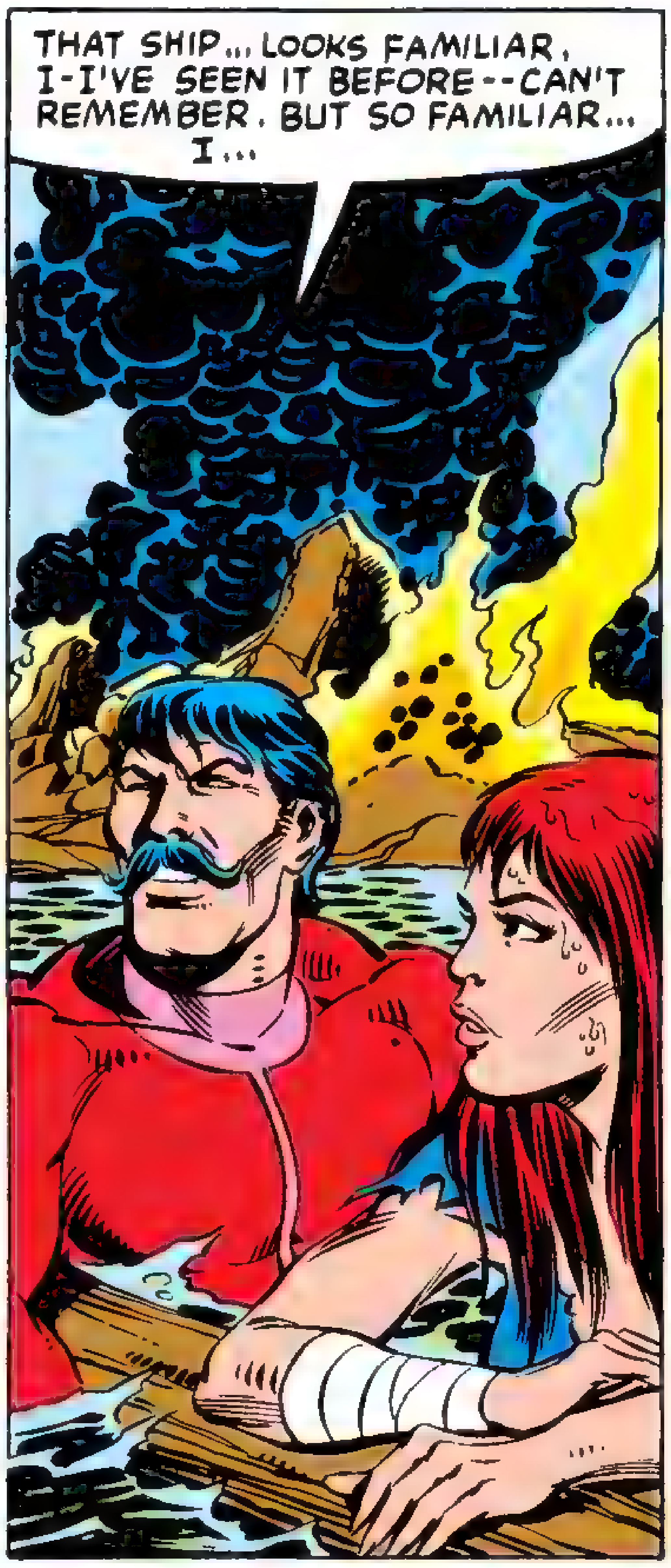

WAIT--SOMETHING'S GONE WRONG! WHAT'S DRAN DOING?
COLONEL FURY-- THERE! ON THE VIEWSCREEN IT'S--!
YEAH!
LISTEN TO ME! I AM THE *REAL* BLACK WIDOW. THE WOMAN ONBOARD IS AN IMPOSTER!
I'VE FOUND IVAN. HE'S BEEN BRAINWASHED. THIS IS ALL PART OF A REVENGE PLAN TO DISCREDIT ME BY KILLING COLONEL FURY--
--AND BLOWING UP THE HELI-CARRIER. YOU MUST BELIEVE ME!
I HAVE THE WOUNDS ON MY ARMS FROM THE GUARD DOGS' ATTACK AT THE RUSSIAN RESEARCH FACILITY. CHECK HER WRISTS. ONLY THE REAL WIDOW WOULD HAVE THEM.
MS. ROMANOFF?
VERY CLEVER, WIDOW! SUCH A RECENT INJURY WAS THE *ONE* PART OF YOUR MAKE-UP WE COULDN'T DUPLICATE.
BUT I'LL STILL SUCCEED--AND YOU'LL BE RUINED AS PLANNED--ON A SLIGHTLY UPDATED TIME-TABLE!
BZZZPP!
BLAM!
NOT LIKELY, SISTER.
AWRIGHT, EVERYBODY TO BATTLE STATIONS. I HAD A HUNCH SOMETHIN' WUZN'T RIGHT ABOUT THIS SIDE TRIP, SO I HAD THE ISLAND SCANNED AND THE WEAPONS SYSTEMS PUT ON RED ALERT--JUST IN CASE. BUT I COULDN'T START SHOOTIN' UNTIL I KNEW WHAT WAS GOIN' ON.
NOW--I'M GONNA WARN THE WIDOW TA GET OFFA THAT ISLAND. YOU WAIT FER MY SIGNAL--THEN OPEN FIRE. THAT SHOULD BE ALL THE HEADSTART SHE'LL NEED.

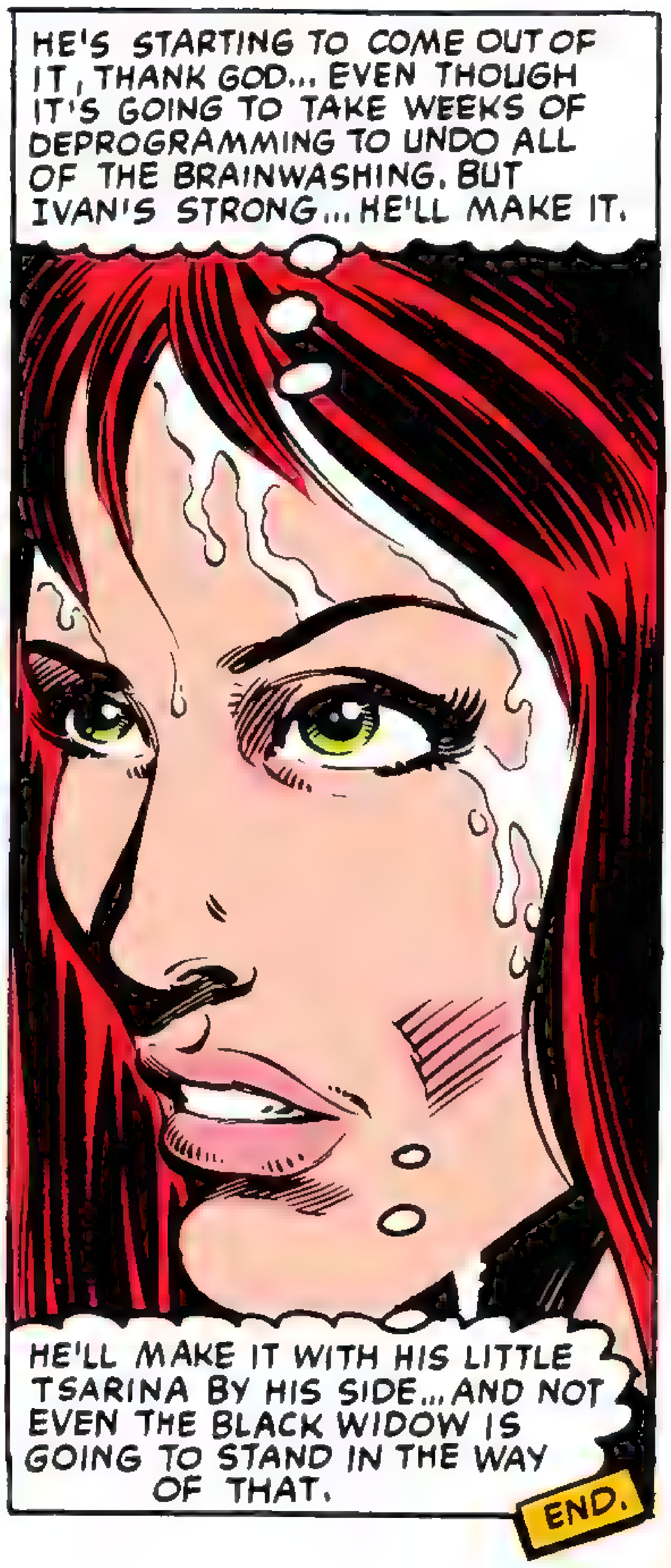

COMPLEX COMPUTER GUIDANCE SYSTEMS INSTANTLY LOCK ONTO THE HIDDEN WEAPONS SET-UP!
A BARRAGE OF SHELLS DETONATE ON THE TARGETED AREAS--
--DESTROYING THE MAMMOTH CANNONS MERE SECONDS BEFORE THEY CAN BE FIRED.
BRAKOOMM!
IVAN--QUICKLY! COME WITH ME! IF WE REMAIN HERE A MOMENT LONGER WE'LL DIE WHEN THE PLACE COLLAPSES!
IVAN--WE MUST GO!
WHILE OUTSIDE THE COMPLEX, A FIGURE IS STUNNED INTO IMMOBILITY...
NO--IT CAN'T END THIS WAY! I WAS SO CLOSE--MOMENTS FROM ACHIEVING MY REVENGE!
IT WAS ALL PLANNED PERFECTLY! WHAT COULD HAVE GONE WRONG!?
WHAT?!
WHAAATTT?!


THE MADMAN'S TORMENTED CRY SOON MIXES WITH THE DEAFENING ROAR OF THE ISLAND'S DEATH THROES.
THE AWESOME REVERBERATIONS ROCK THE HELICARRIER, AS STABILIZING GYROS STRUGGLE TO KEEP HER UPRIGHT.


EVENTUALLY, THE AIR CALMS, AND THE MORNING SUN RISES ON THE ASHES OF DAMON DRAN AND HIS DREAM.


A SMALL SKIMMER IS DISPATCHED FOR SURVIVORS...
WELL, LOOKIT THAT. FURY SAID THE WIDOW'D MAKE IT OFF THE ISLAND 'CAUSE SHE'S THE BEST THERE IS.
WHEN A WOMAN LIKE THAT SETS HER SIGHTS ON SURVIVIN' NOTHIN'S GONNA STOP HER!


THAT SHIP... LOOKS FAMILIAR. I-I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE--CAN'T REMEMBER. BUT SO FAMILIAR... I...


HE'S STARTING TO COME OUT OF IT, THANK GOD... EVEN THOUGH IT'S GOING TO TAKE WEEKS OF DEPROGRAMMING TO UNDO ALL OF THE BRAINWASHING. BUT IVAN'S STRONG... HE'LL MAKE IT.
HE'LL MAKE IT WITH HIS LITTLE TSARINA BY HIS SIDE... AND NOT EVEN THE BLACK WIDOW IS GOING TO STAND IN THE WAY OF THAT.
END.

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HAWKEYE
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BLACK WIDOW™
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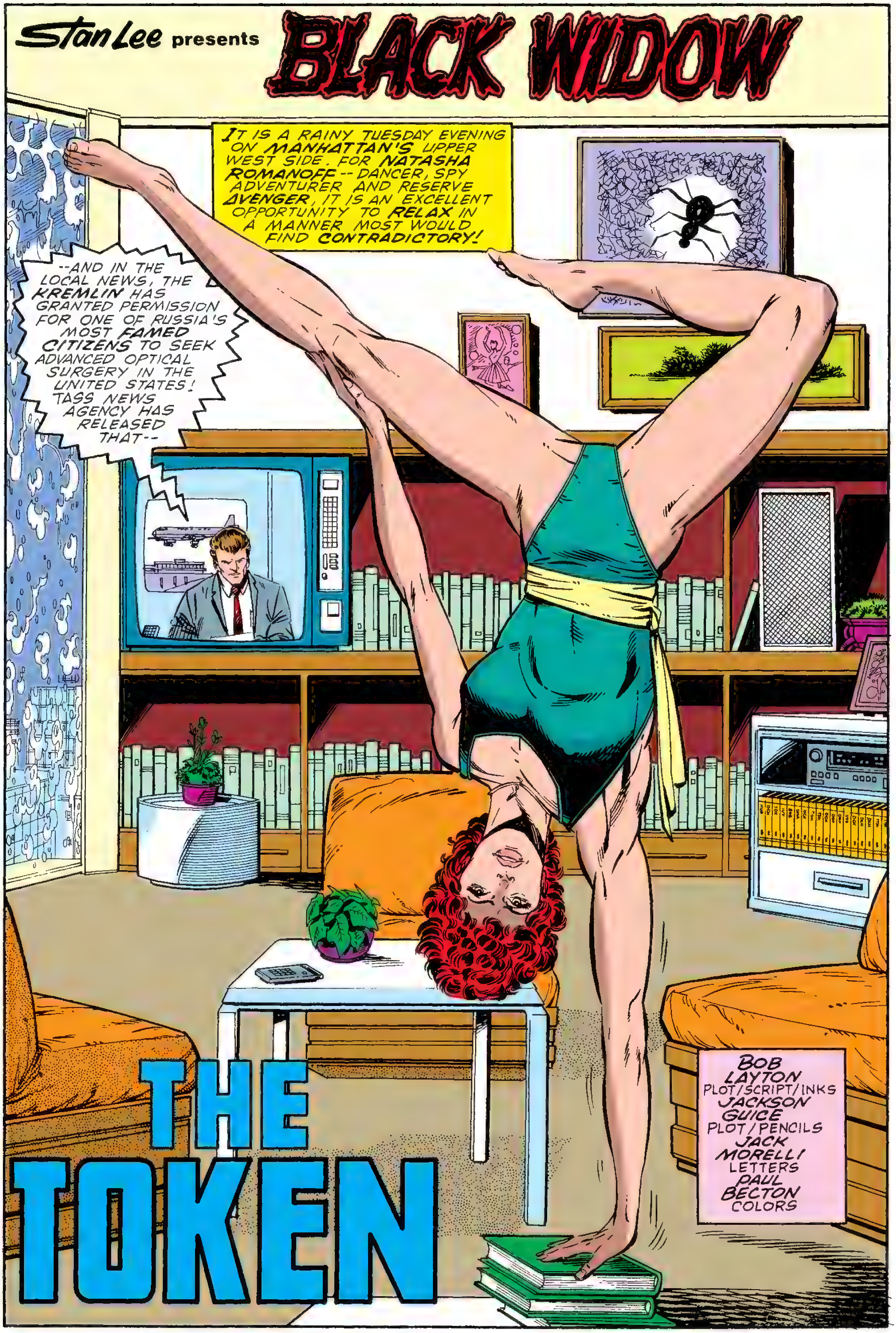
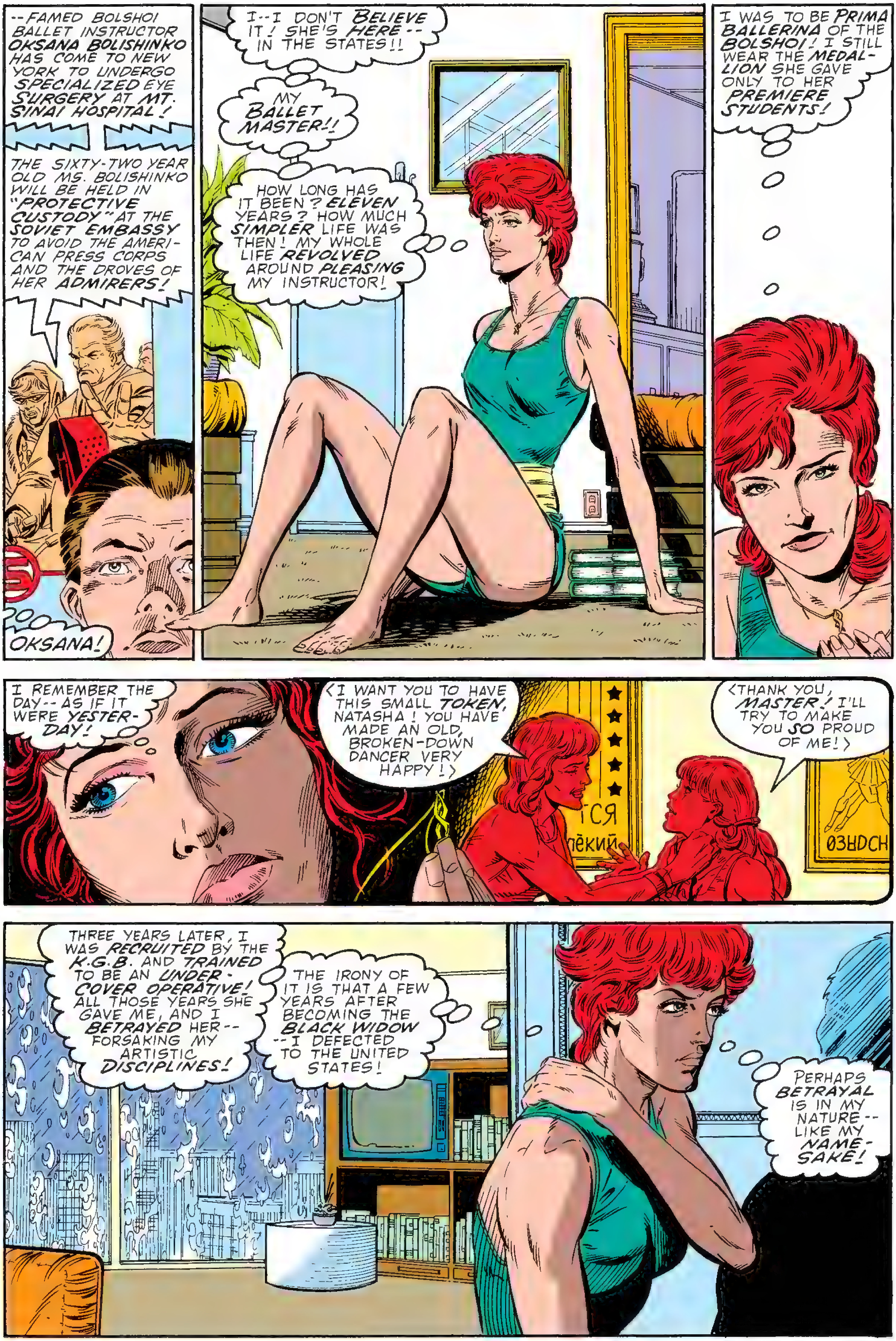
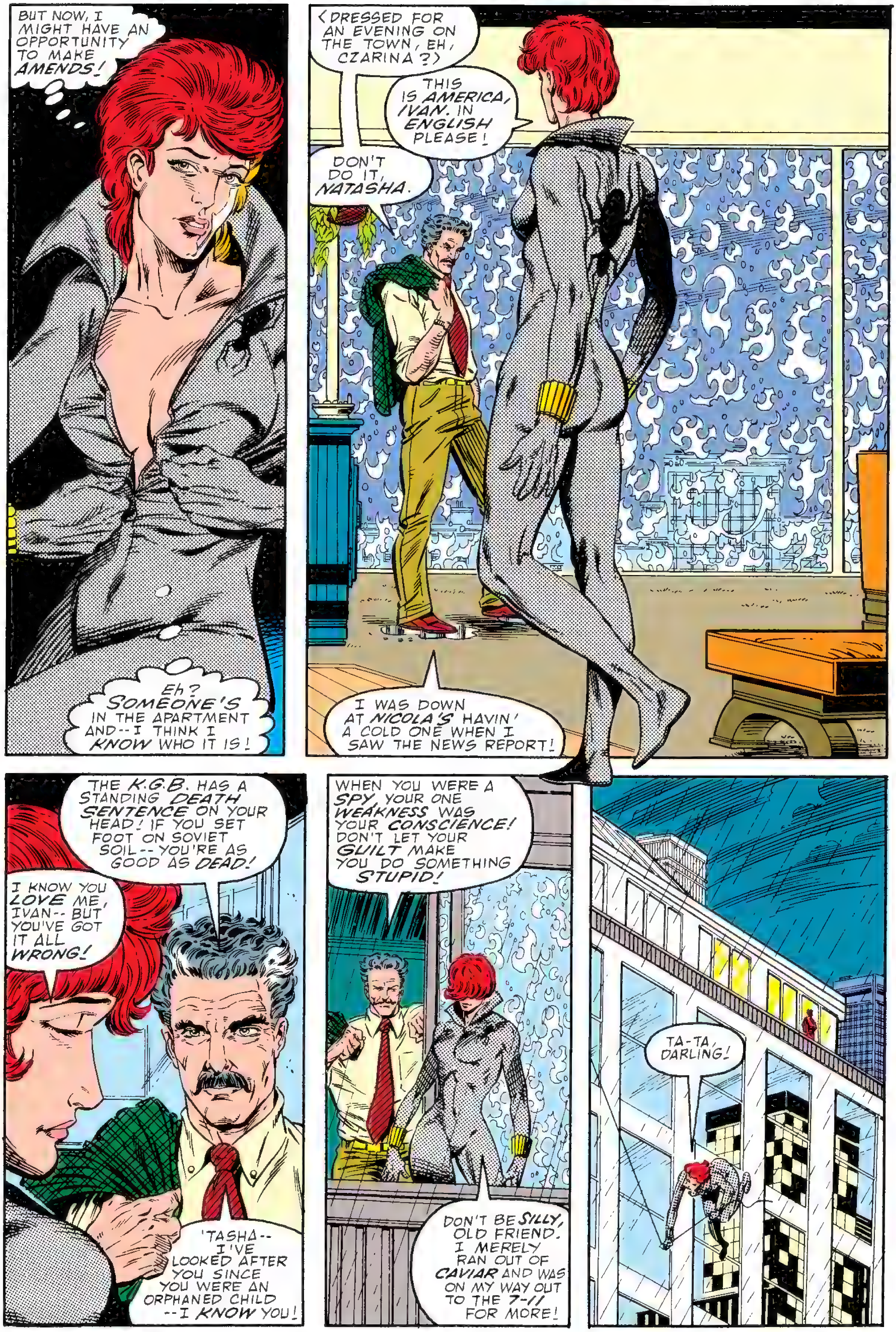
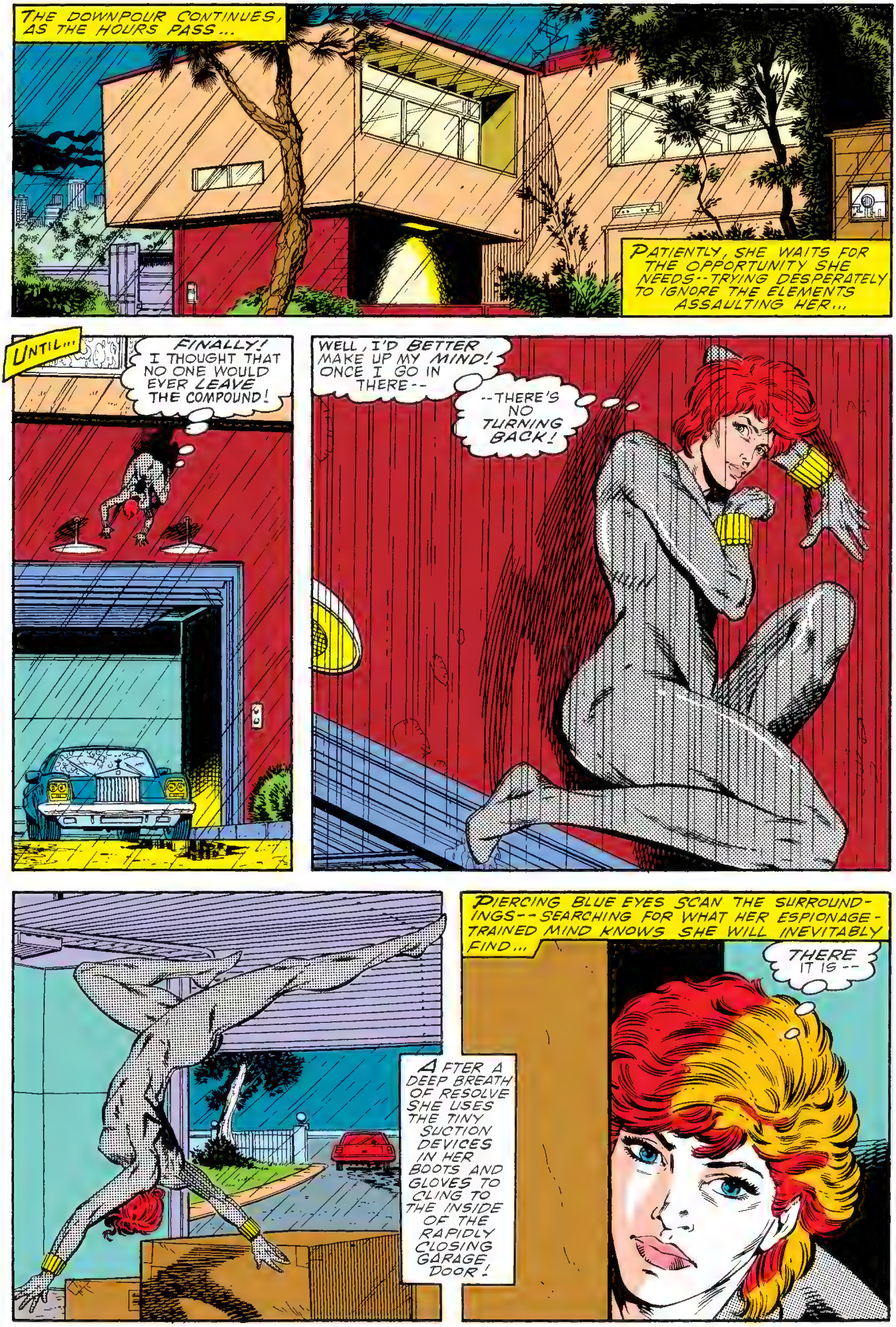
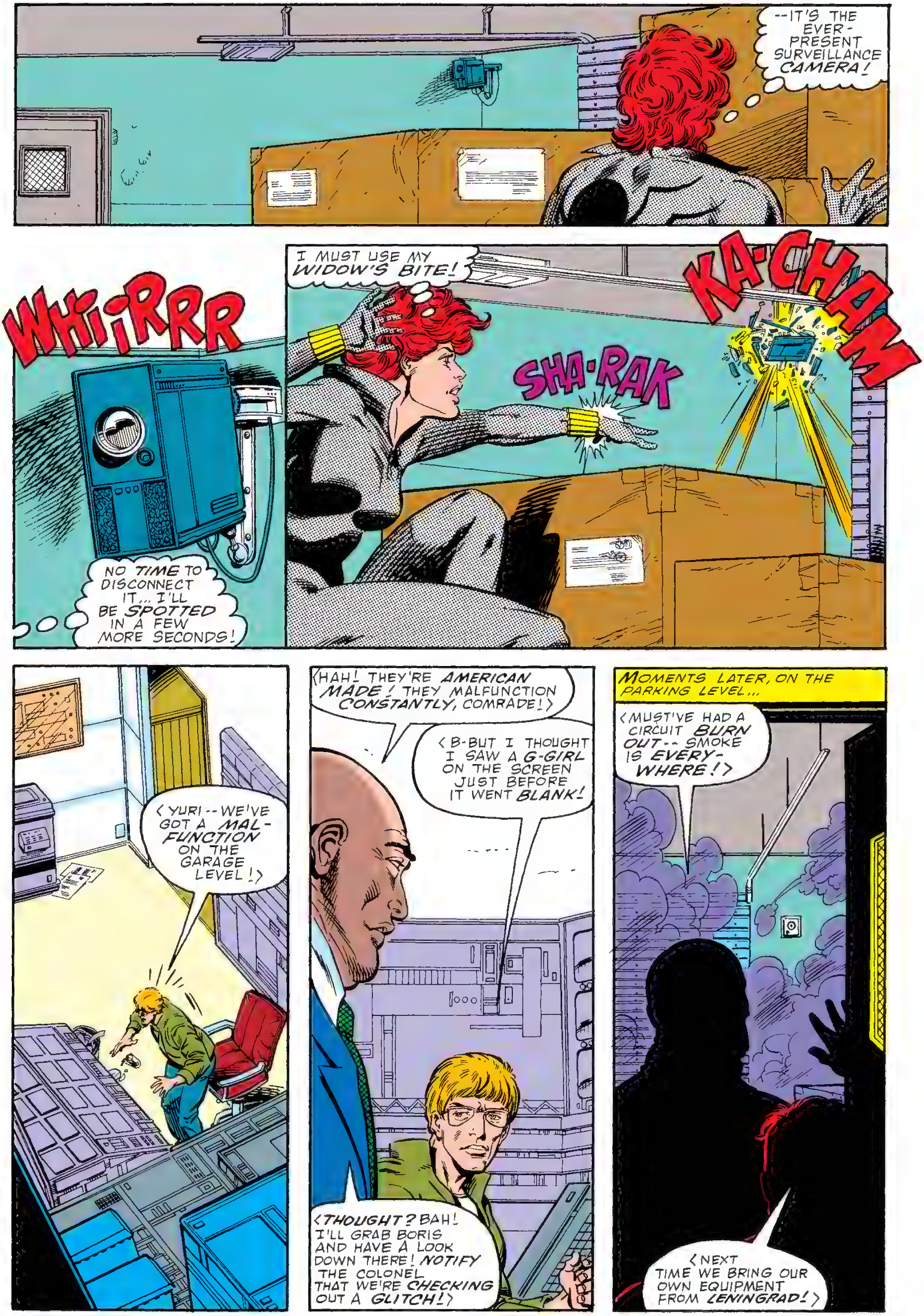
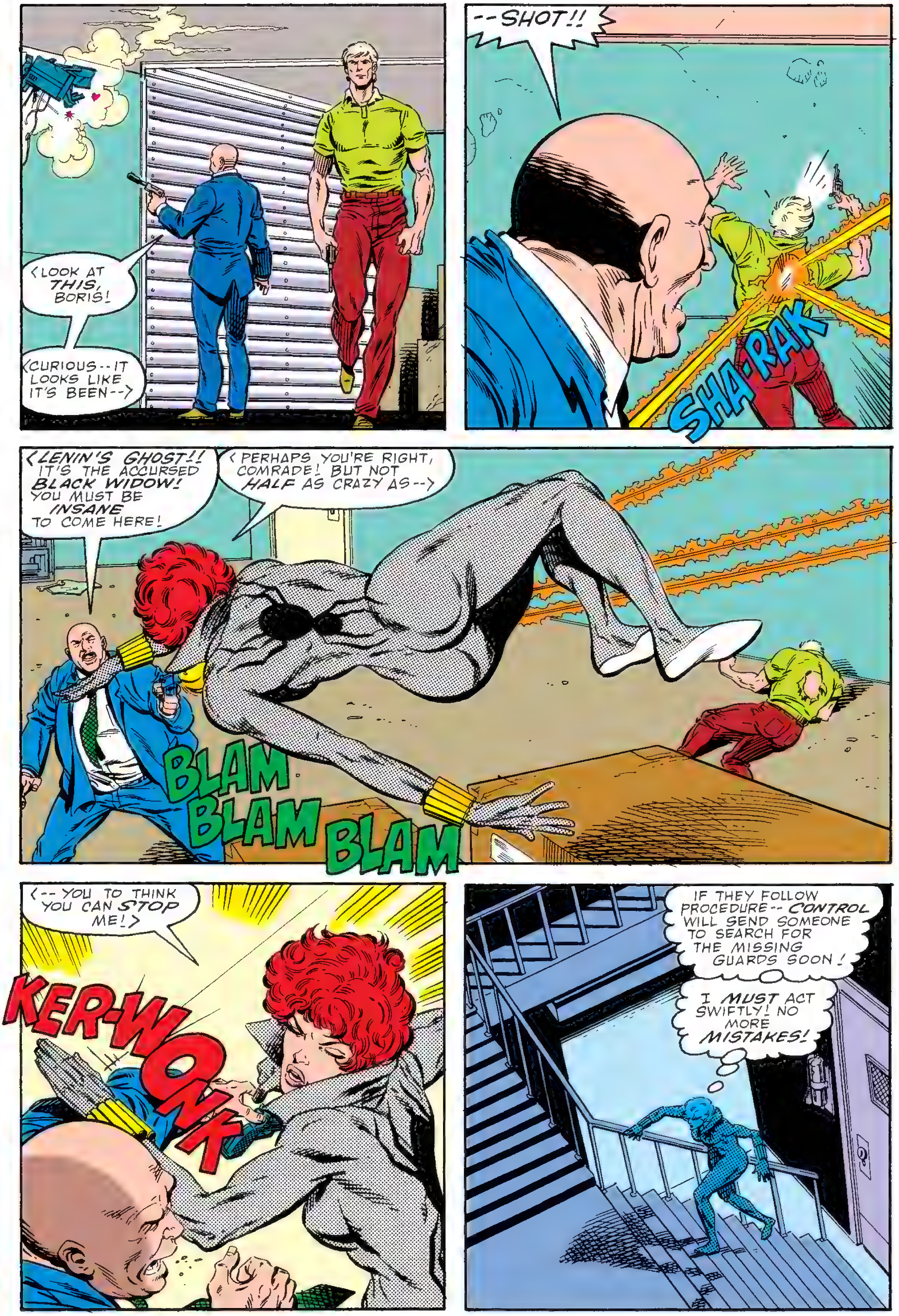

Stan Lee presents BLACK WIDOW
IT IS A RAINY TUESDAY EVENING ON MANHATTAN'S UPPER WEST SIDE. FOR NATASHA ROMANOFF -- DANCER, SPY ADVENTURER AND RESERVE AVENGER, IT IS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO RELAX IN A MANNER MOST WOULD FIND CONTRADICTORY!
--AND IN THE LOCAL NEWS, THE KREMLIN HAS GRANTED PERMISSION FOR ONE OF RUSSIA'S MOST FAMED CITIZENS TO SEEK ADVANCED OPTICAL SURGERY IN THE UNITED STATES! TASS NEWS AGENCY HAS RELEASED THAT--
THE TOKEN
BOB LAYTON PLOT/SCRIPT/INKS
JACKSON GUICE PLOT/PENCILS
JACK MORELLI LETTERS
PAUL BECTON COLORS

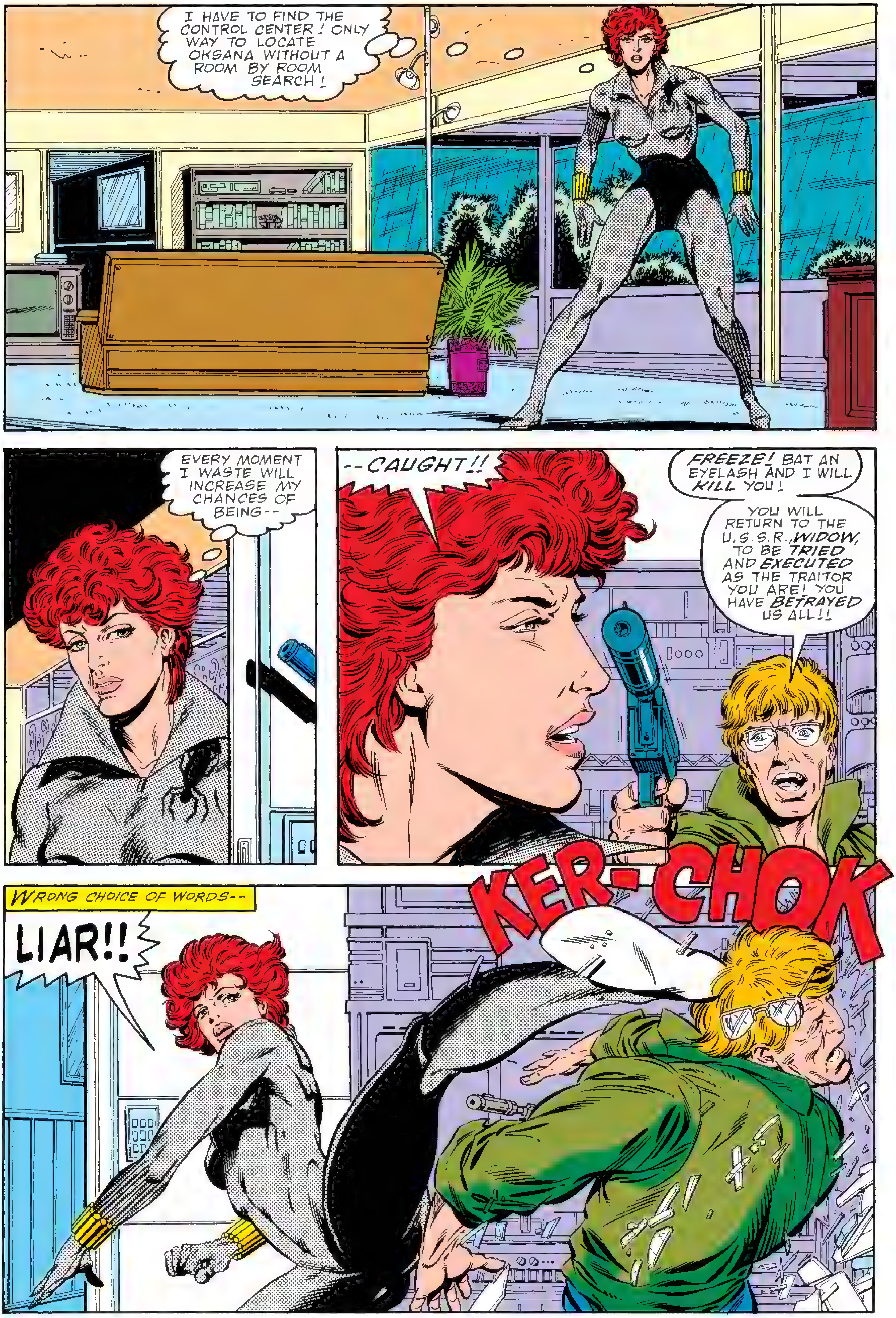

--FAMED BOLSHOI BALLET INSTRUCTOR OKSANA BOLISHINKO HAS COME TO NEW YORK TO UNDERGO SPECIALIZED EYE SURGERY AT MT. SINAI HOSPITAL!
THE SIXTY-TWO YEAR OLD MS. BOLISHINKO WILL BE HELD IN "PROTECTIVE CUSTODY" AT THE SOVIET EMBASSY TO AVOID THE AMERICAN PRESS CORPS AND THE DROVES OF HER ADMIRERS!
OKSANA!
I--I DON'T BELIEVE IT! SHE'S HERE--IN THE STATES!!
MY BALLET MASTER!!
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN? ELEVEN YEARS? HOW MUCH SIMPLER LIFE WAS THEN! MY WHOLE LIFE REVOLVED AROUND PLEASING MY INSTRUCTOR!
I WAS TO BE PRIMA BALLERINA OF THE BOLSHOI! I STILL WEAR THE MEDALLION SHE GAVE ONLY TO HER PREMIERE STUDENTS!
I REMEMBER THE DAY--AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY!
<I WANT YOU TO HAVE THIS SMALL TOKEN, NATASHA! YOU HAVE MADE AN OLD, BROKEN-DOWN DANCER VERY HAPPY!>
<THANK YOU, MASTER! I'LL TRY TO MAKE YOU SO PROUD OF ME!>
ТСЯ
пёкий
03ЯDCH
THREE YEARS LATER, I WAS RECRUITED BY THE K.G.B. AND TRAINED TO BE AN UNDERCOVER OPERATIVE! ALL THOSE YEARS SHE GAVE ME, AND I BETRAYED HER--FORSAKING MY ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES!
THE IRONY OF IT IS THAT A FEW YEARS AFTER BECOMING THE BLACK WIDOW--I DEFECTED TO THE UNITED STATES!
PERHAPS BETRAYAL IS IN MY NATURE--LIKE MY NAMESAKE!

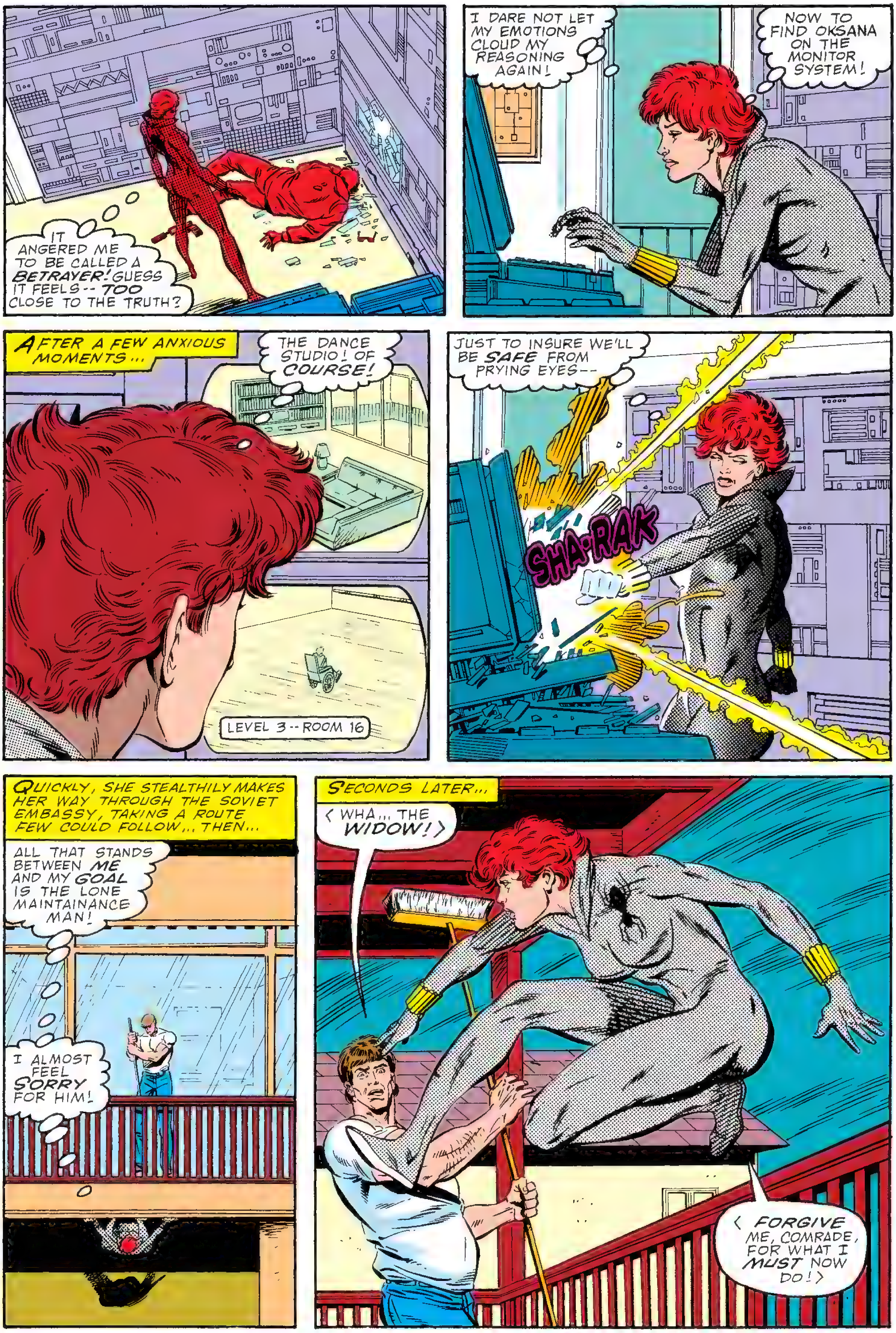

BUT NOW, I MIGHT HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE AMENDS!
Eh? SOMEONE'S IN THE APARTMENT AND-- I THINK I KNOW WHO IT IS!
<DRESSED FOR AN EVENING ON THE TOWN, EH, CZARINA?>
THIS IS AMERICA, IVAN. IN ENGLISH PLEASE!
DON'T DO IT, NATASHA.
I WAS DOWN AT NICOLA'S HAVIN' A COLD ONE WHEN I SAW THE NEWS REPORT!
THE K.G.B. HAS A STANDING DEATH SENTENCE ON YOUR HEAD! IF YOU SET FOOT ON SOVIET SOIL--YOU'RE AS GOOD AS DEAD!
I KNOW YOU LOVE ME, IVAN-- BUT YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG!
'TASHA-- I'VE LOOKED AFTER YOU SINCE YOU WERE AN ORPHANED CHILD --I KNOW YOU!
WHEN YOU WERE A SPY, YOUR ONE WEAKNESS WAS YOUR CONSCIENCE! DON'T LET YOUR GUILT MAKE YOU DO SOMETHING STUPID!
DON'T BE SILLY, OLD FRIEND. I MERELY RAN OUT OF CAVIAR AND WAS ON MY WAY OUT TO THE 7-11 FOR MORE!
TA-TA, DARLING!

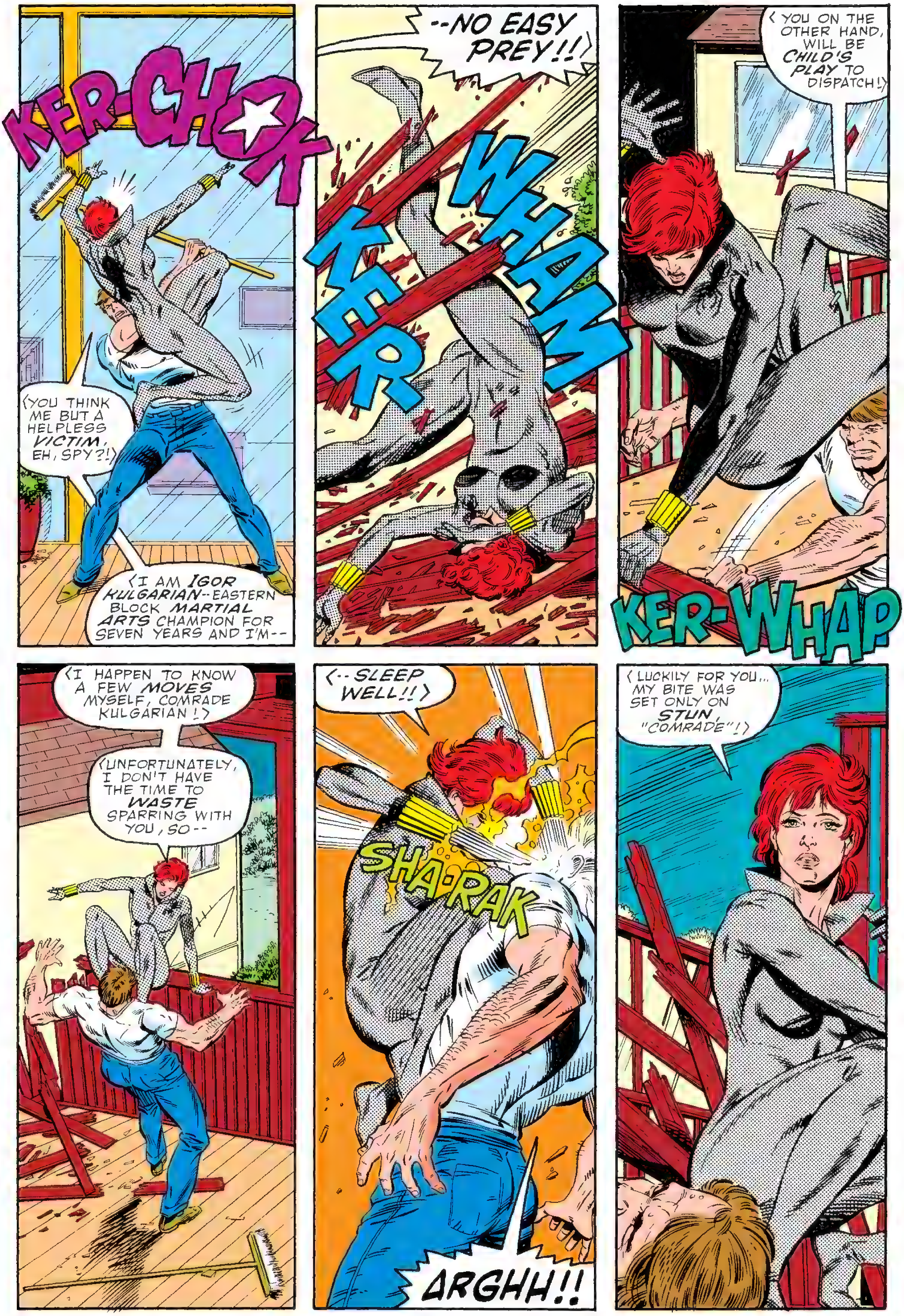

THE DOWNPOUR CONTINUES, AS THE HOURS PASS...
PATIENTLY, SHE WAITS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY SHE NEEDS--TRYING DESPERATELY TO IGNORE THE ELEMENTS ASSAULTING HER...
UNTIL...
FINALLY! I THOUGHT THAT NO ONE WOULD EVER LEAVE THE COMPOUND!
WELL, I'D BETTER MAKE UP MY MIND! ONCE I GO IN THERE--
--THERE'S NO TURNING BACK!
AFTER A DEEP BREATH OF RESOLVE SHE USES THE TINY SUCTION DEVICES IN HER BOOTS AND GLOVES TO CLING TO THE INSIDE OF THE RAPIDLY CLOSING GARAGE DOOR!
PIERCING BLUE EYES SCAN THE SURROUNDINGS--SEARCHING FOR WHAT HER ESPIONAGE-TRAINED MIND KNOWS SHE WILL INEVITABLY FIND...
THERE IT IS--

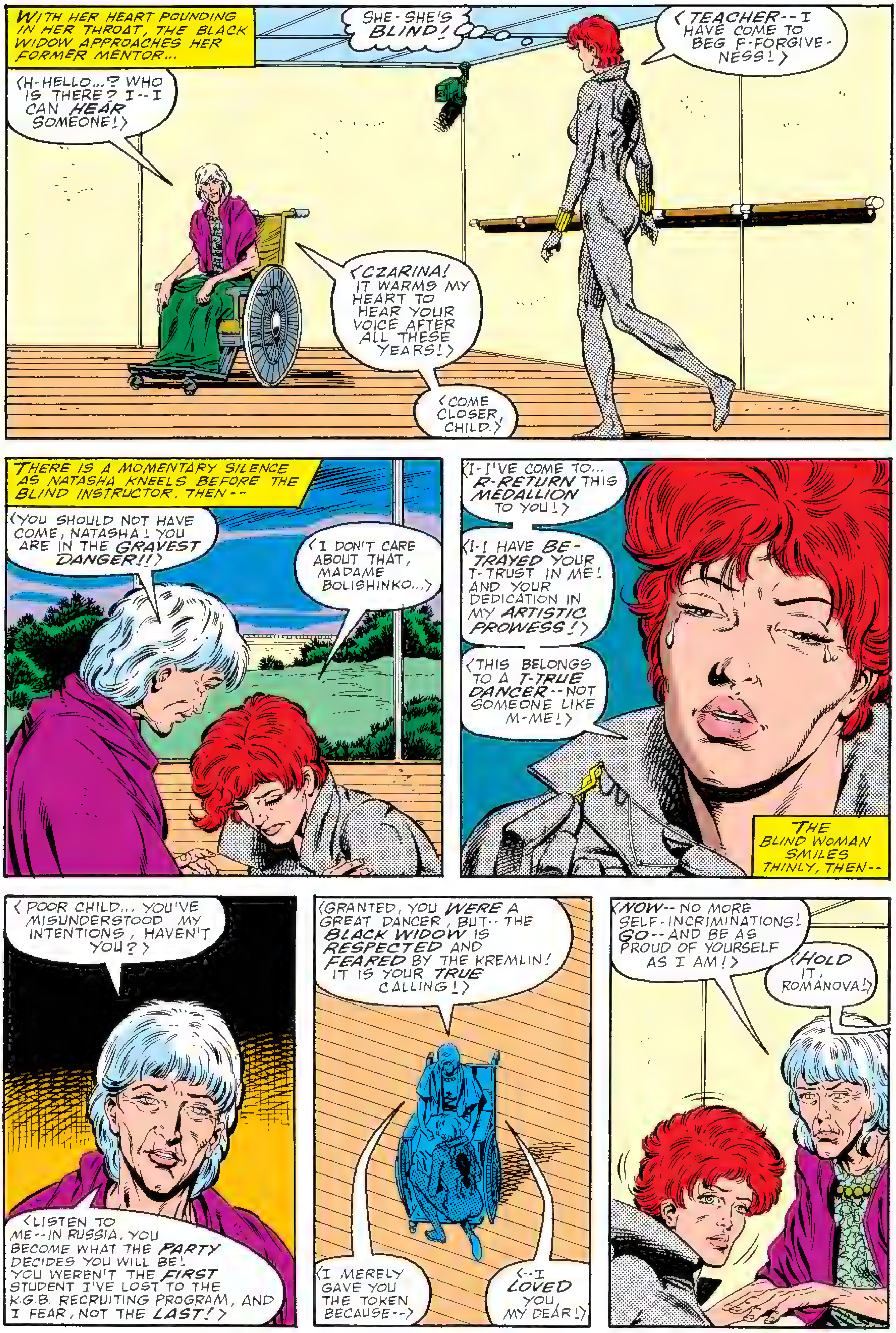

--IT'S THE EVER-PRESENT SURVEILLANCE CAMERA!
WHIRRR
I MUST USE MY WIDOW'S BITE!
KA-CHAM
SHA-RAK
NO TIME TO DISCONNECT IT... I'LL BE SPOTTED IN A FEW MORE SECONDS!
‹YURI--WE'VE GOT A MALFUNCTION ON THE GARAGE LEVEL!›
‹HAH! THEY'RE AMERICAN MADE! THEY MALFUNCTION CONSTANTLY, COMRADE!›
‹B-BUT I THOUGHT I SAW A G-GIRL ON THE SCREEN JUST BEFORE IT WENT BLANK!›
‹THOUGHT? BAH! I'LL GRAB BORIS AND HAVE A LOOK DOWN THERE! NOTIFY THE COLONEL THAT WE'RE CHECKING OUT A GLITCH!›
MOMENTS LATER, ON THE PARKING LEVEL...
‹MUST'VE HAD A CIRCUIT BURN OUT-- SMOKE IS EVERYWHERE!›
‹NEXT TIME WE BRING OUR OWN EQUIPMENT FROM LENINGRAD!›

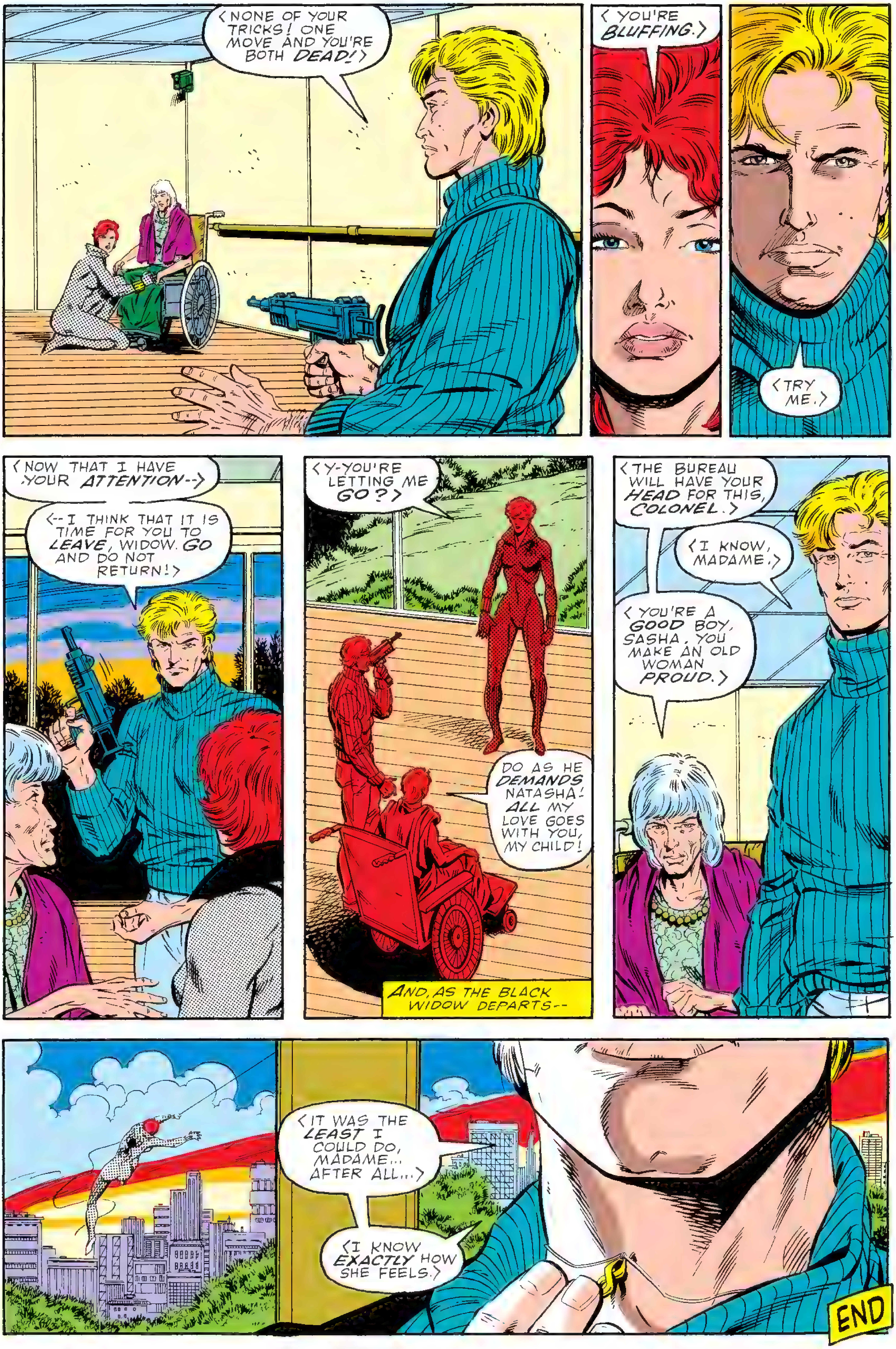

‹LOOK AT THIS, BORIS!›
‹CURIOUS -- IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S BEEN --›
-- SHOT!!
SHA-RAK
‹LENIN'S GHOST!! IT'S THE ACCURSED BLACK WIDOW! YOU MUST BE INSANE TO COME HERE!›
‹PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, COMRADE! BUT NOT HALF AS CRAZY AS --›
BLAM BLAM BLAM
‹-- YOU TO THINK YOU CAN STOP ME!›
KER-WONK
IF THEY FOLLOW PROCEDURE -- CONTROL WILL SEND SOMEONE TO SEARCH FOR THE MISSING GUARDS SOON!
I MUST ACT SWIFTLY! NO MORE MISTAKES!

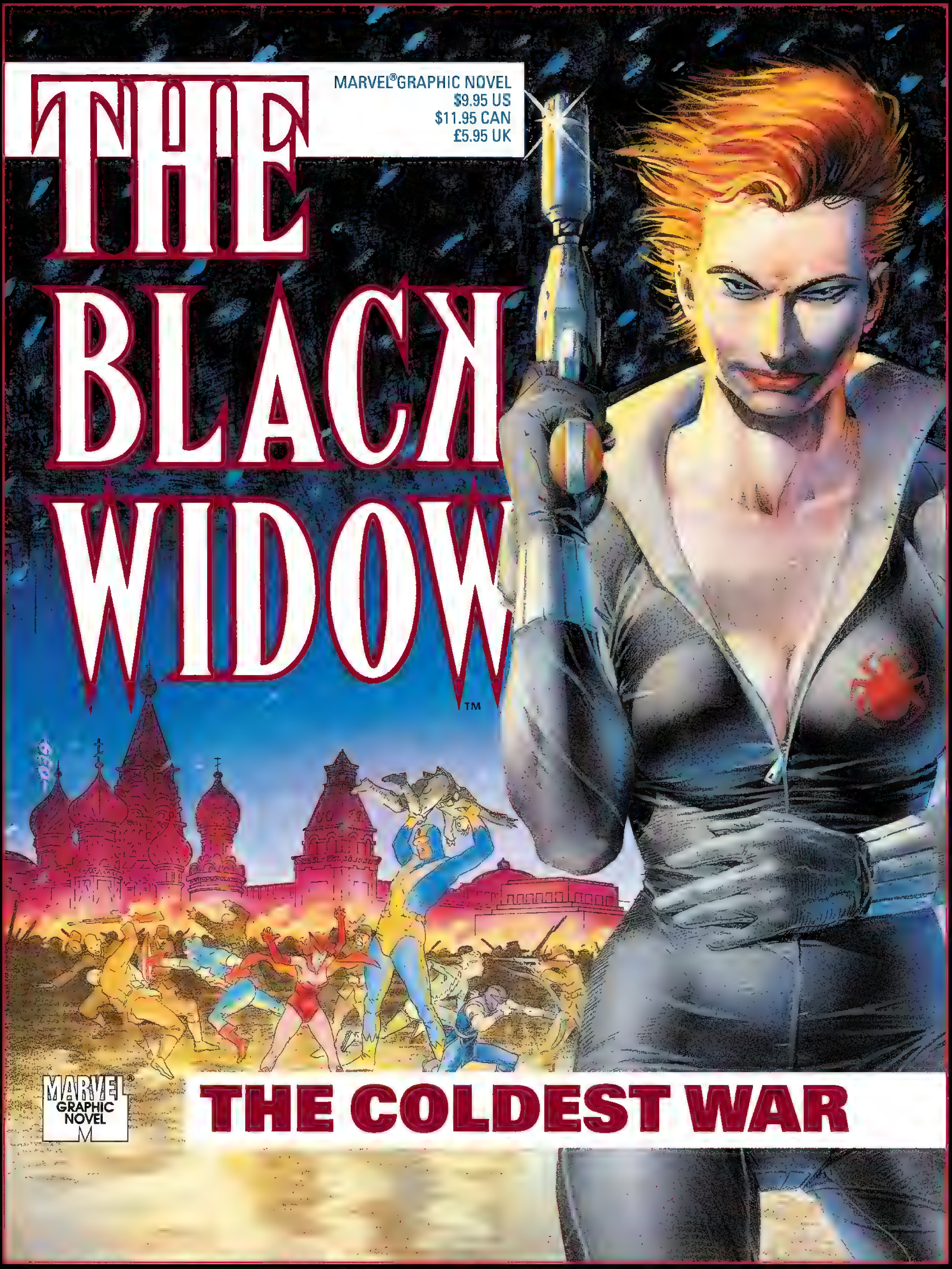

I HAVE TO FIND THE CONTROL CENTER! ONLY WAY TO LOCATE OKSANA WITHOUT A ROOM BY ROOM SEARCH!
EVERY MOMENT I WASTE WILL INCREASE MY CHANCES OF BEING--
--CAUGHT!!
FREEZE! BAT AN EYELASH AND I WILL KILL YOU!
YOU WILL RETURN TO THE U.S.S.R., WIDOW, TO BE TRIED AND EXECUTED AS THE TRAITOR YOU ARE! YOU HAVE BETRAYED US ALL!!
WRONG CHOICE OF WORDS--
LIAR!!
KER-CHOK


IT ANGERED ME TO BE CALLED A *BETRAYER!* GUESS IT FEELS -- *TOO* CLOSE TO THE TRUTH?
I DARE NOT LET MY EMOTIONS CLOUD MY REASONING AGAIN!
NOW TO FIND OKSANA ON THE MONITOR SYSTEM!
AFTER A FEW ANXIOUS MOMENTS...
THE DANCE STUDIO! OF *COURSE!*
LEVEL 3 -- ROOM 16
JUST TO INSURE WE'LL BE *SAFE* FROM PRYING EYES --
SHA-RAK
QUICKLY, SHE STEALTHILY MAKES HER WAY THROUGH THE SOVIET EMBASSY, TAKING A ROUTE FEW COULD FOLLOW... THEN...
ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN *ME* AND MY *GOAL* IS THE LONE MAINTAINANCE MAN!
I ALMOST FEEL *SORRY* FOR HIM!
SECONDS LATER...
‹ WHA... THE *WIDOW!* ›
‹ *FORGIVE* ME, COMRADE, FOR WHAT I *MUST* NOW DO! ›


KER-CHOK
〈YOU THINK ME BUT A HELPLESS VICTIM, EH, SPY?!〉
〈I AM IGOR KULGARIAN--EASTERN BLOCK MARTIAL ARTS CHAMPION FOR SEVEN YEARS AND I'M--
--NO EASY PREY!!〉
KER WHAM
〈YOU ON THE OTHER HAND, WILL BE CHILD'S PLAY TO DISPATCH!〉
KER-WHAP
〈I HAPPEN TO KNOW A FEW MOVES MYSELF, COMRADE KULGARIAN!〉
〈UNFORTUNATELY, I DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO WASTE SPARRING WITH YOU, SO--
〈--SLEEP WELL!!〉
SHA-RAK
ARGHH!!
〈LUCKILY FOR YOU... MY BITE WAS SET ONLY ON STUN, "COMRADE"!〉


WITH HER HEART POUNDING IN HER THROAT, THE BLACK WIDOW APPROACHES HER FORMER MENTOR...
SHE-SHE'S BLIND!
⟨TEACHER--I HAVE COME TO BEG F-FORGIVENESS!⟩
⟨H-HELLO...? WHO IS THERE? I--I CAN HEAR SOMEONE!⟩
⟨CZARINA! IT WARMS MY HEART TO HEAR YOUR VOICE AFTER ALL THESE YEARS!⟩
⟨COME CLOSER, CHILD.⟩
THERE IS A MOMENTARY SILENCE AS NATASHA KNEELS BEFORE THE BLIND INSTRUCTOR. THEN--
⟨YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE COME, NATASHA! YOU ARE IN THE GRAVEST DANGER!!⟩
⟨I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT, MADAME BOLISHINKO...⟩
⟨I-I'VE COME TO... R-RETURN THIS MEDALLION TO YOU!⟩
⟨I-I HAVE BETRAYED YOUR T-TRUST IN ME! AND YOUR DEDICATION IN MY ARTISTIC PROWESS!⟩
⟨THIS BELONGS TO A T-TRUE DANCER--NOT SOMEONE LIKE M-ME!⟩
THE BLIND WOMAN SMILES THINLY, THEN--
⟨POOR CHILD... YOU'VE MISUNDERSTOOD MY INTENTIONS, HAVEN'T YOU?⟩
⟨LISTEN TO ME--IN RUSSIA, YOU BECOME WHAT THE PARTY DECIDES YOU WILL BE! YOU WEREN'T THE FIRST STUDENT I'VE LOST TO THE K.G.B. RECRUITING PROGRAM, AND I FEAR, NOT THE LAST!⟩
⟨GRANTED, YOU WERE A GREAT DANCER, BUT--THE BLACK WIDOW IS RESPECTED AND FEARED BY THE KREMLIN! IT IS YOUR TRUE CALLING!⟩
⟨I MERELY GAVE YOU THE TOKEN BECAUSE--⟩
⟨--I LOVED YOU, MY DEAR!⟩
⟨NOW--NO MORE SELF-INCRIMINATIONS! GO--AND BE AS PROUD OF YOURSELF AS I AM!⟩
⟨HOLD IT, ROMANOVA!⟩


〈NONE OF YOUR TRICKS! ONE MOVE AND YOU'RE BOTH DEAD!〉
〈YOU'RE BLUFFING.〉
〈TRY ME.〉
〈NOW THAT I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION--〉
〈--I THINK THAT IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO LEAVE, WIDOW. GO AND DO NOT RETURN!〉
〈Y-YOU'RE LETTING ME GO?〉
DO AS HE DEMANDS NATASHA! ALL MY LOVE GOES WITH YOU, MY CHILD!
AND, AS THE BLACK WIDOW DEPARTS--
〈THE BUREAU WILL HAVE YOUR HEAD FOR THIS, COLONEL.〉
〈I KNOW, MADAME.〉
〈YOU'RE A GOOD BOY, SASHA. YOU MAKE AN OLD WOMAN PROUD.〉
〈IT WAS THE LEAST I COULD DO, MADAME... AFTER ALL...〉
〈I KNOW EXACTLY HOW SHE FEELS.〉
END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THE BLACK WIDOW

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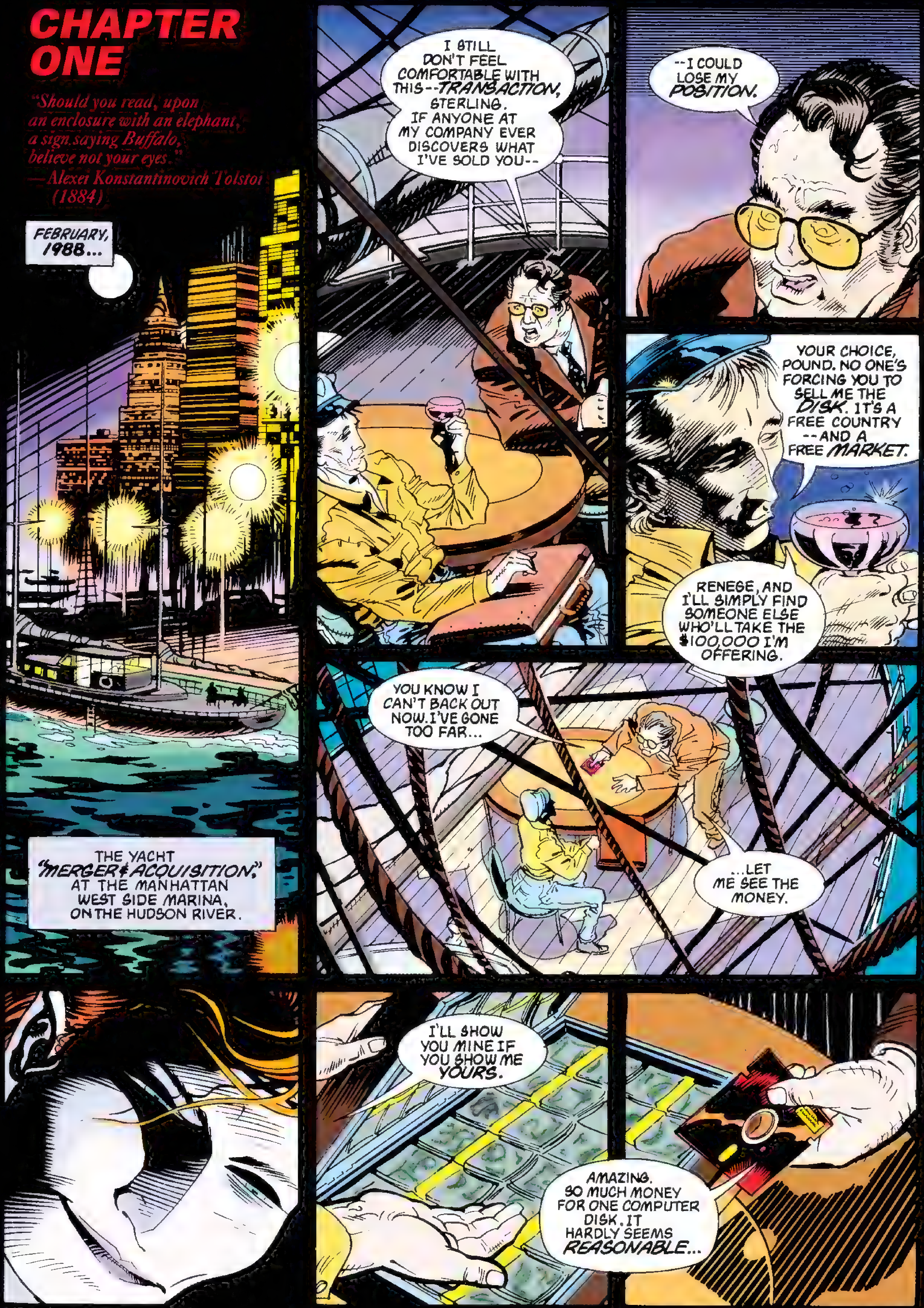
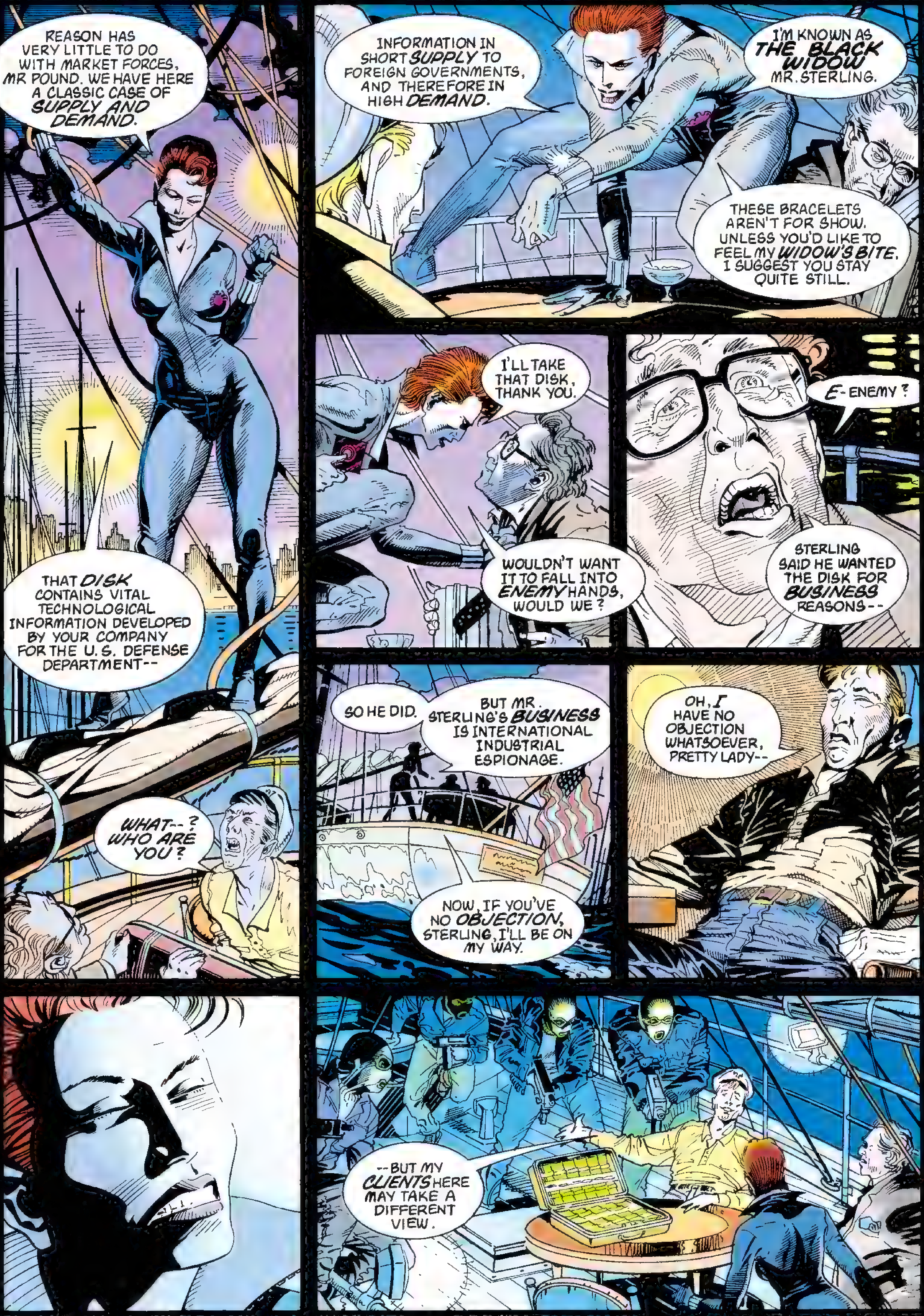
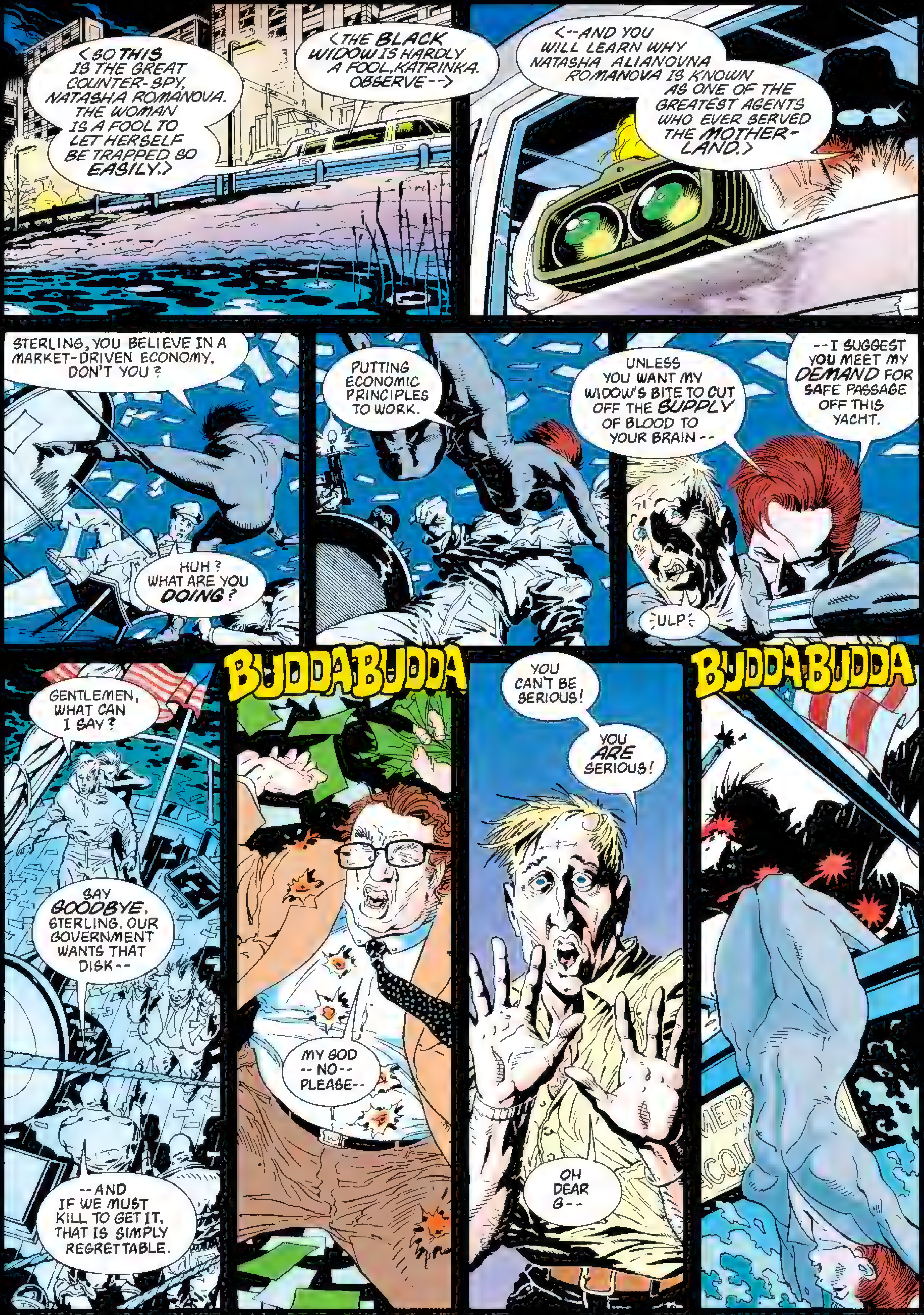
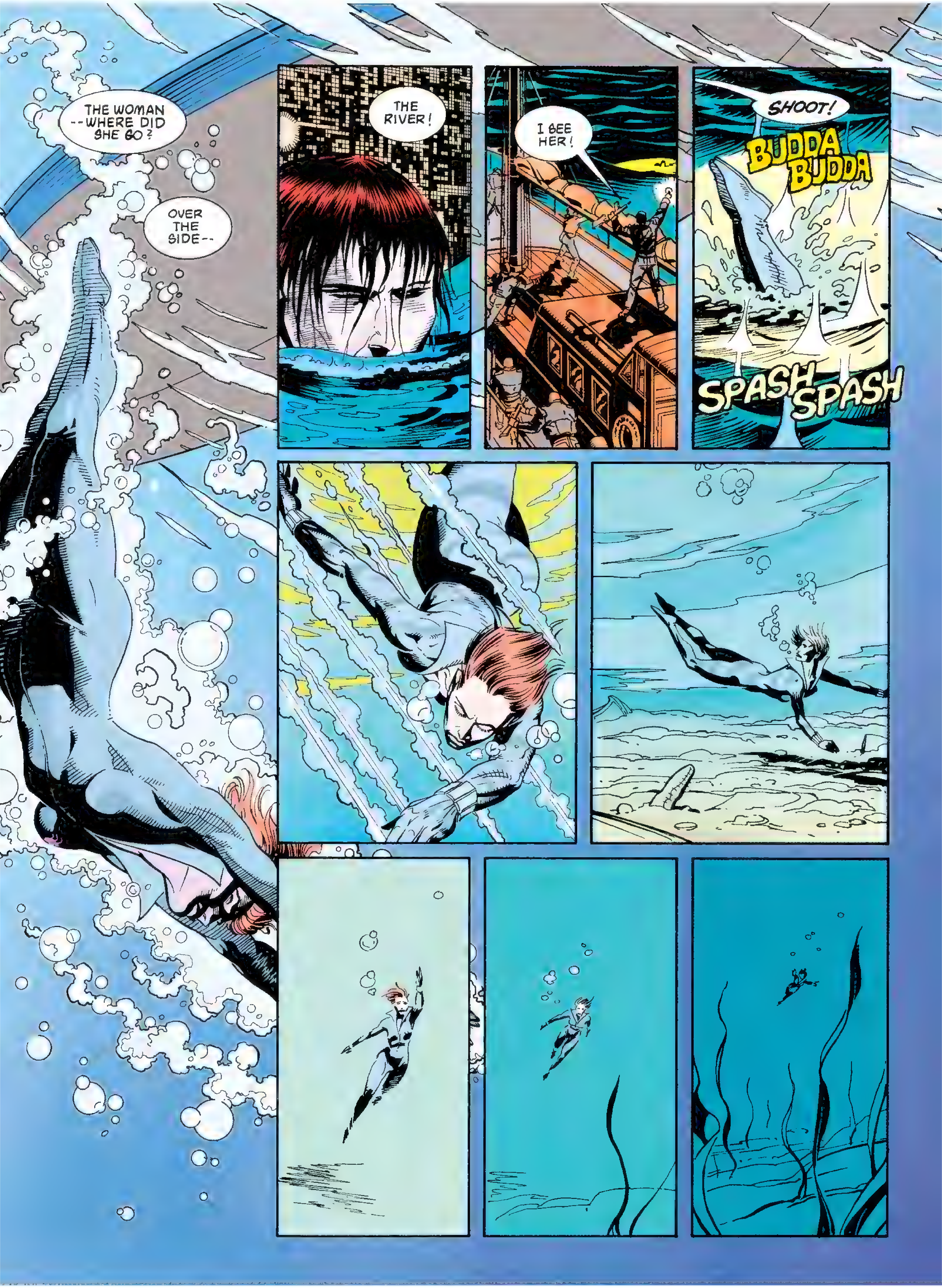
CHAPTER ONE

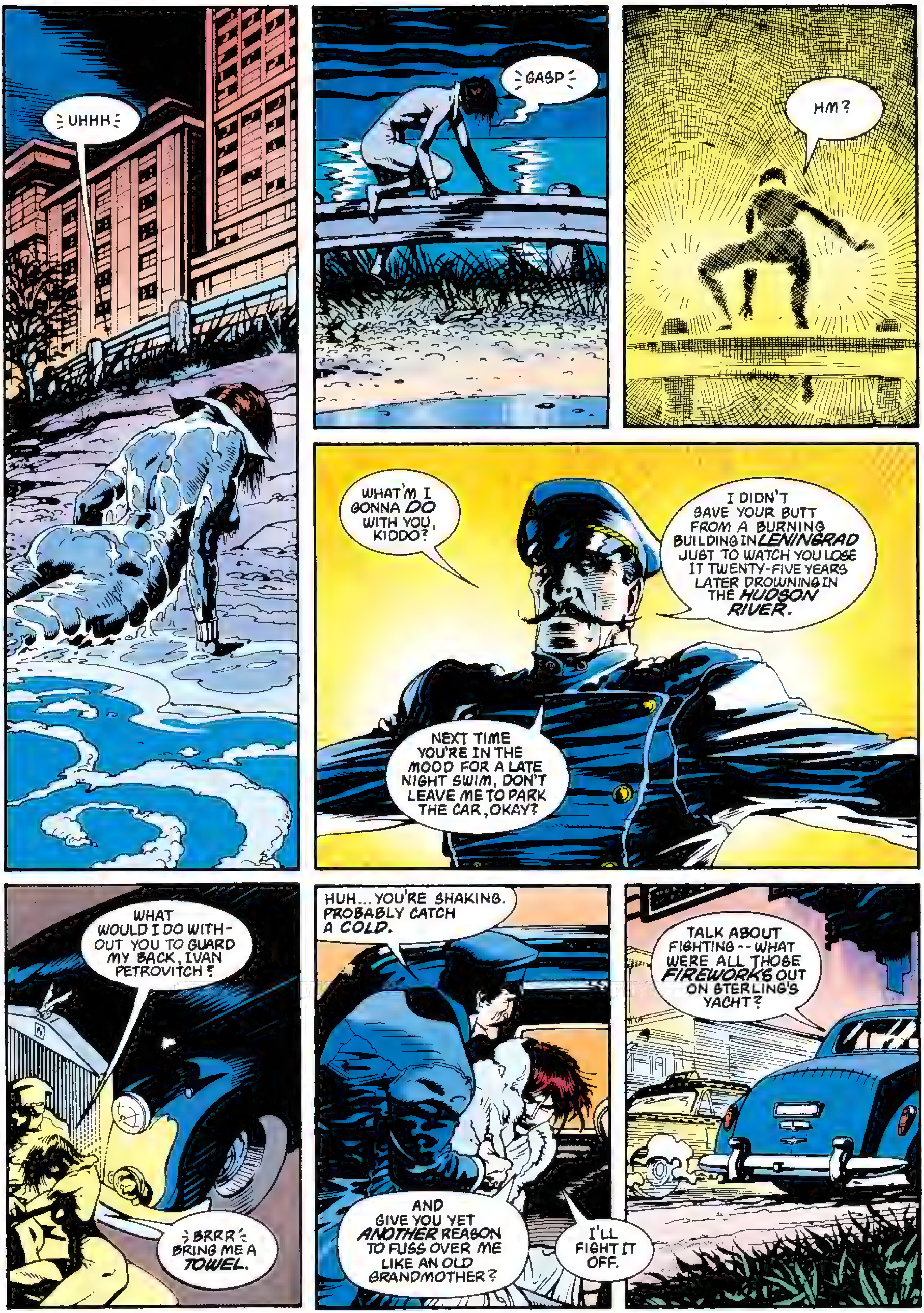
"Should you read, upon
an enclosure with an elephant,
a sign saying Buffalo,
believe not your eyes."
—Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoi
(1884)

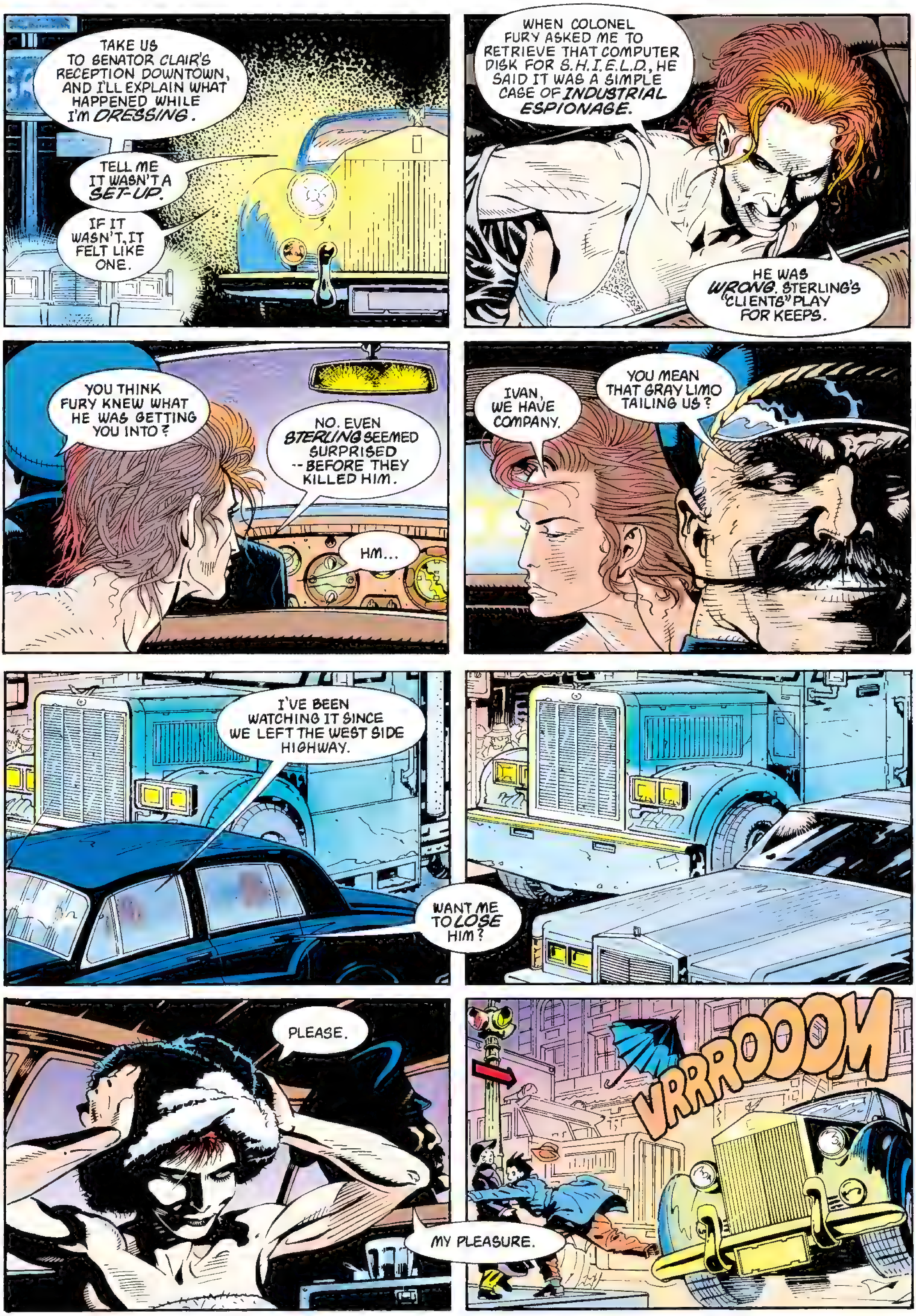

FEBRUARY, 1988...
THE YACHT "MERGER & ACQUISITION," AT THE MANHATTAN WEST SIDE MARINA, ON THE HUDSON RIVER.
I STILL DON'T FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THIS--TRANSACTION, STERLING. IF ANYONE AT MY COMPANY EVER DISCOVERS WHAT I'VE SOLD YOU--
--I COULD LOSE MY POSITION.
YOUR CHOICE, POUND. NO ONE'S FORCING YOU TO SELL ME THE DISK. IT'S A FREE COUNTRY --AND A FREE MARKET.
RENEGE, AND I'LL SIMPLY FIND SOMEONE ELSE WHO'LL TAKE THE $100,000 I'M OFFERING.
YOU KNOW I CAN'T BACK OUT NOW. I'VE GONE TOO FAR...
...LET ME SEE THE MONEY.
I'LL SHOW YOU MINE IF YOU SHOW ME YOURS.
AMAZING. SO MUCH MONEY FOR ONE COMPUTER DISK. IT HARDLY SEEMS REASONABLE...

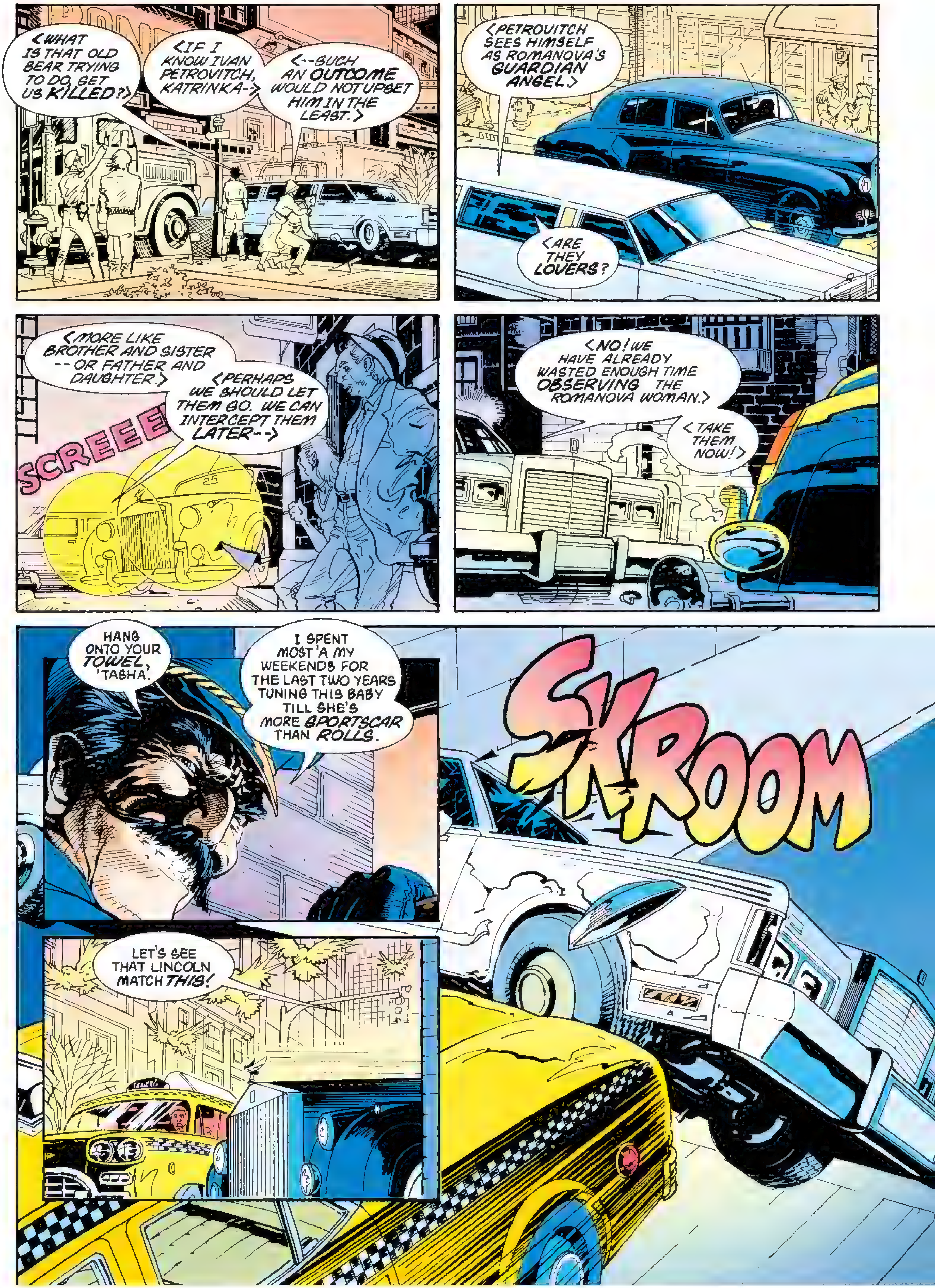

REASON HAS VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH MARKET FORCES, MR POUND. WE HAVE HERE A CLASSIC CASE OF *SUPPLY AND DEMAND.*
THAT *DISK* CONTAINS VITAL TECHNOLOGICAL INFORMATION DEVELOPED BY YOUR COMPANY FOR THE U.S. DEFENSE DEPARTMENT--
WHAT--? WHO ARE YOU?
INFORMATION IN SHORT *SUPPLY* TO FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS, AND THEREFORE IN HIGH *DEMAND.*
I'M KNOWN AS *THE BLACK WIDOW* MR. STERLING.
THESE BRACELETS AREN'T FOR SHOW. UNLESS YOU'D LIKE TO FEEL MY *WIDOW'S BITE,* I SUGGEST YOU STAY QUITE STILL.
I'LL TAKE THAT DISK, THANK YOU.
WOULDN'T WANT IT TO FALL INTO *ENEMY* HANDS, WOULD WE?
E-ENEMY?
STERLING SAID HE WANTED THE DISK FOR *BUSINESS* REASONS--
SO HE DID.
BUT MR. STERLING'S *BUSINESS* IS INTERNATIONAL INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE.
NOW, IF YOU'VE NO *OBJECTION,* STERLING, I'LL BE ON MY WAY.
OH, *I* HAVE NO OBJECTION WHATSOEVER, PRETTY LADY--
--BUT MY *CLIENTS* HERE MAY TAKE A DIFFERENT VIEW.

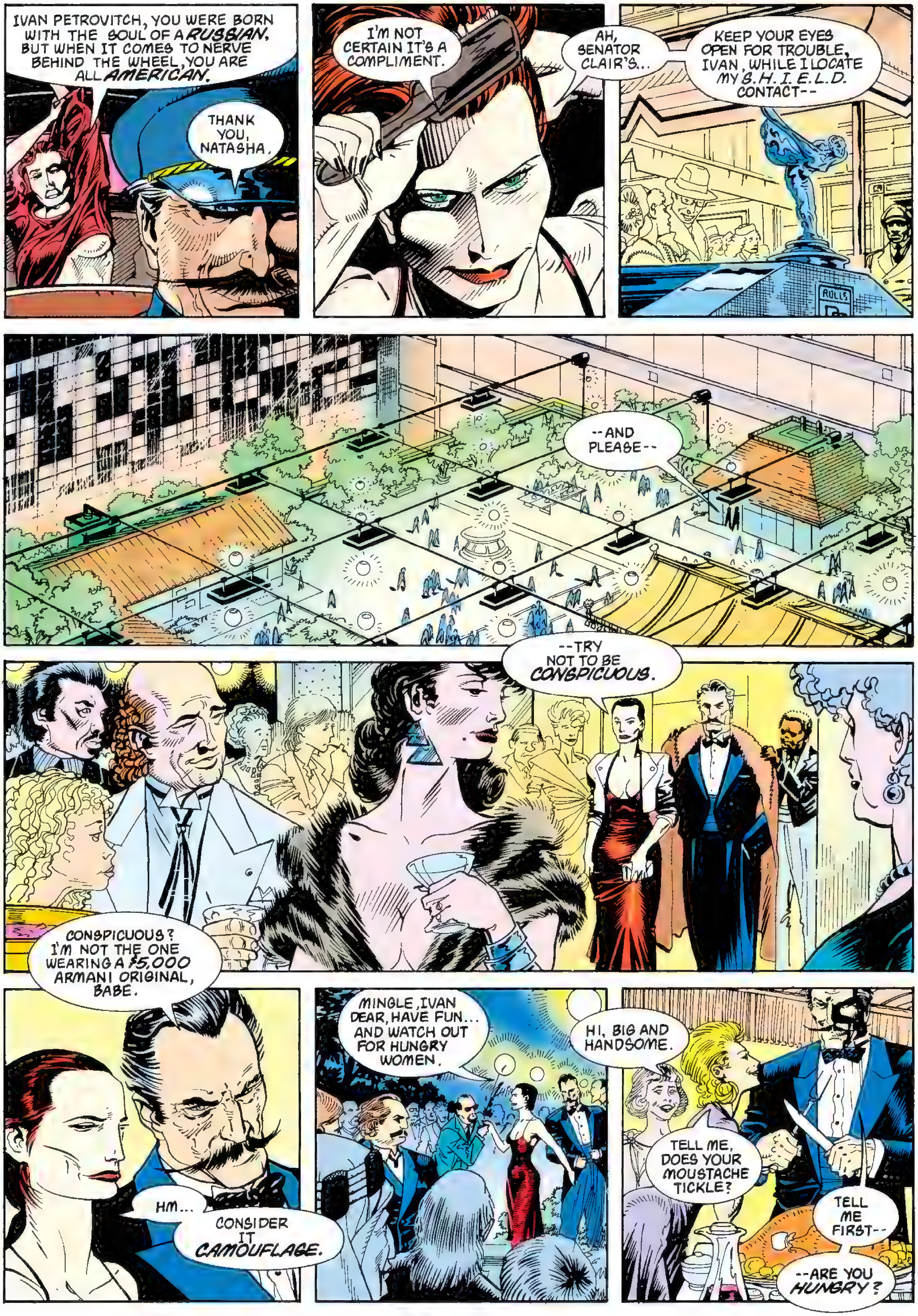

<SO THIS IS THE GREAT COUNTER-SPY, NATASHA ROMANOVA. THE WOMAN IS A FOOL TO LET HERSELF BE TRAPPED SO EASILY.>
<THE BLACK WIDOW IS HARDLY A FOOL, KATRINKA. OBSERVE-->
<--AND YOU WILL LEARN WHY NATASHA ALIANOVNA ROMANOVA IS KNOWN AS ONE OF THE GREATEST AGENTS WHO EVER SERVED THE MOTHER-LAND.>
STERLING, YOU BELIEVE IN A MARKET-DRIVEN ECONOMY, DON'T YOU?
HUH? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
PUTTING ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES TO WORK.
UNLESS YOU WANT MY WIDOW'S BITE TO CUT OFF THE SUPPLY OF BLOOD TO YOUR BRAIN--
--I SUGGEST YOU MEET MY DEMAND FOR SAFE PASSAGE OFF THIS YACHT.
ULP
GENTLEMEN, WHAT CAN I SAY?
SAY GOODBYE, STERLING. OUR GOVERNMENT WANTS THAT DISK--
--AND IF WE MUST KILL TO GET IT, THAT IS SIMPLY REGRETTABLE.
BUDDABUDDA
MY GOD --NO-- PLEASE--
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!
YOU ARE SERIOUS!
OH DEAR G--
BUDDABUDDA

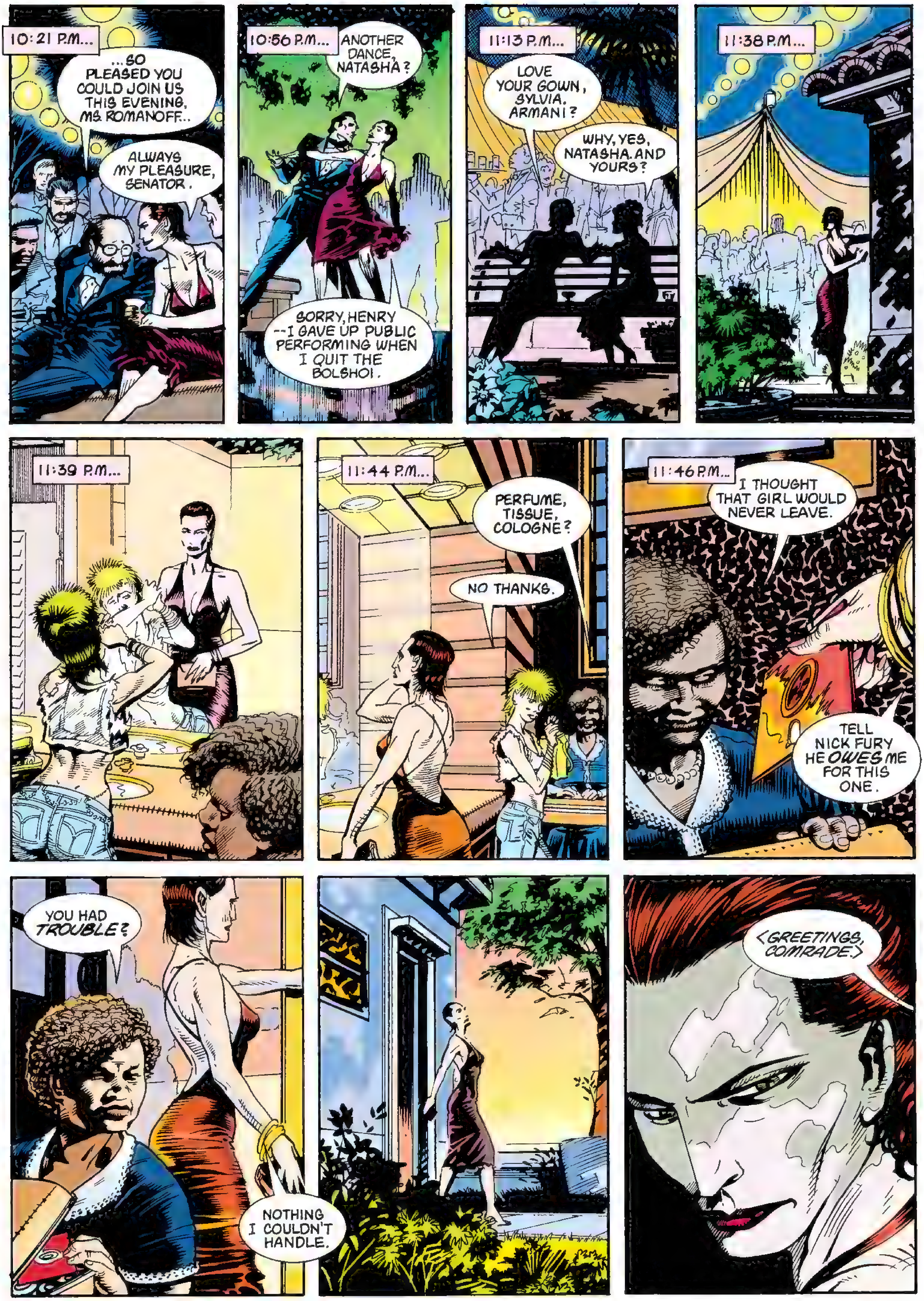

THE WOMAN --WHERE DID SHE GO?
OVER THE SIDE--
THE RIVER!
I SEE HER!
SHOOT!
BUDDA BUDDA
SPASH SPASH

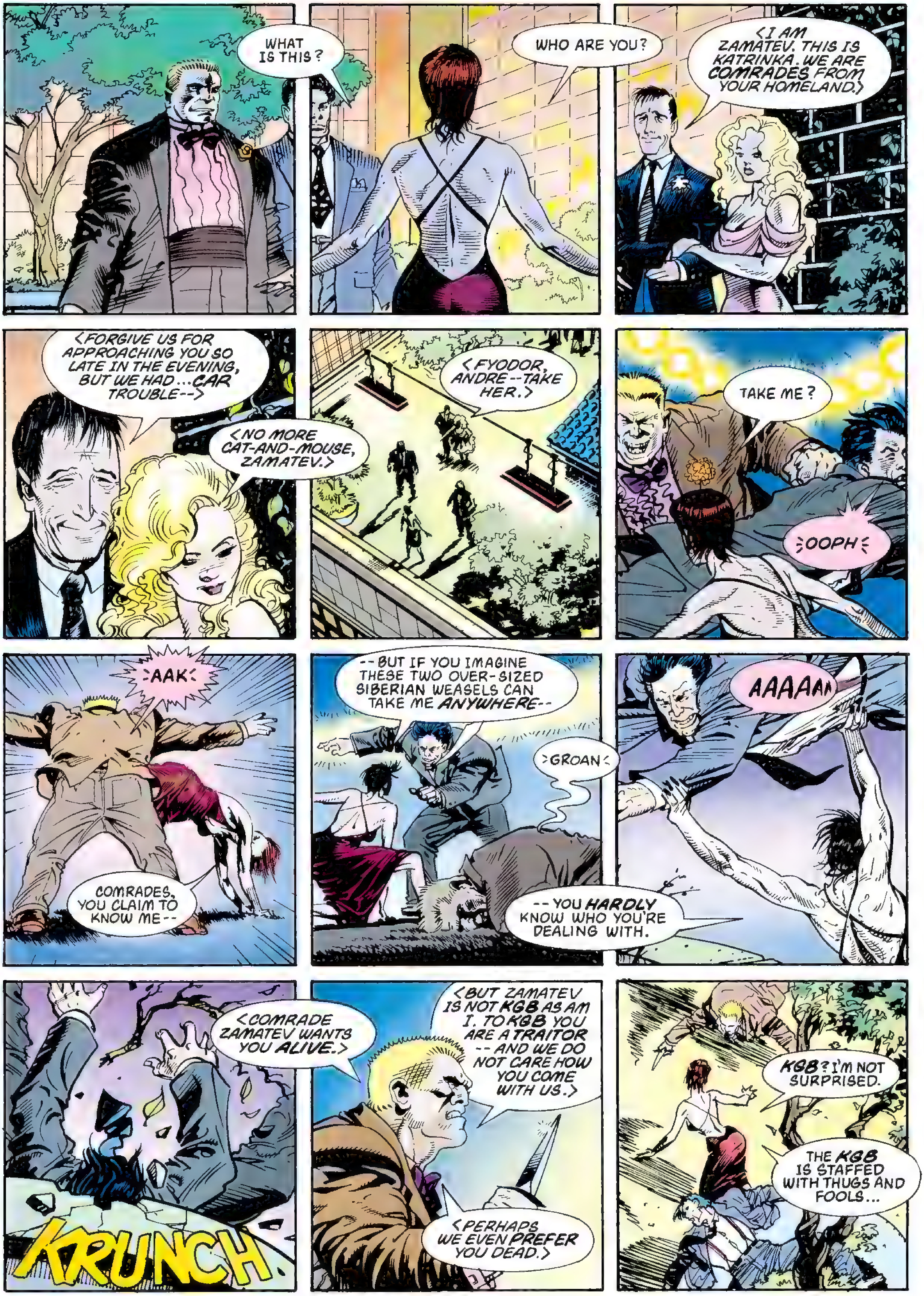

UHHH
GASP
HM?
WHAT'M I GONNA *DO* WITH YOU, KIDDO?
I DIDN'T SAVE YOUR BUTT FROM A BURNING BUILDING IN *LENINGRAD* JUST TO WATCH YOU LOSE IT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER DROWNING IN THE *HUDSON RIVER*.
NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN THE MOOD FOR A LATE NIGHT SWIM, DON'T LEAVE ME TO PARK THE CAR, OKAY?
WHAT WOULD I DO WITHOUT YOU TO GUARD MY BACK, IVAN PETROVITCH?
BRRR BRING ME A *TOWEL*.
HUH... YOU'RE SHAKING. PROBABLY CATCH A *COLD*.
AND GIVE YOU YET *ANOTHER* REASON TO FUSS OVER *ME* LIKE AN OLD GRANDMOTHER?
I'LL FIGHT IT OFF.
TALK ABOUT FIGHTING -- WHAT WERE ALL THOSE *FIREWORKS* OUT ON STERLING'S YACHT?

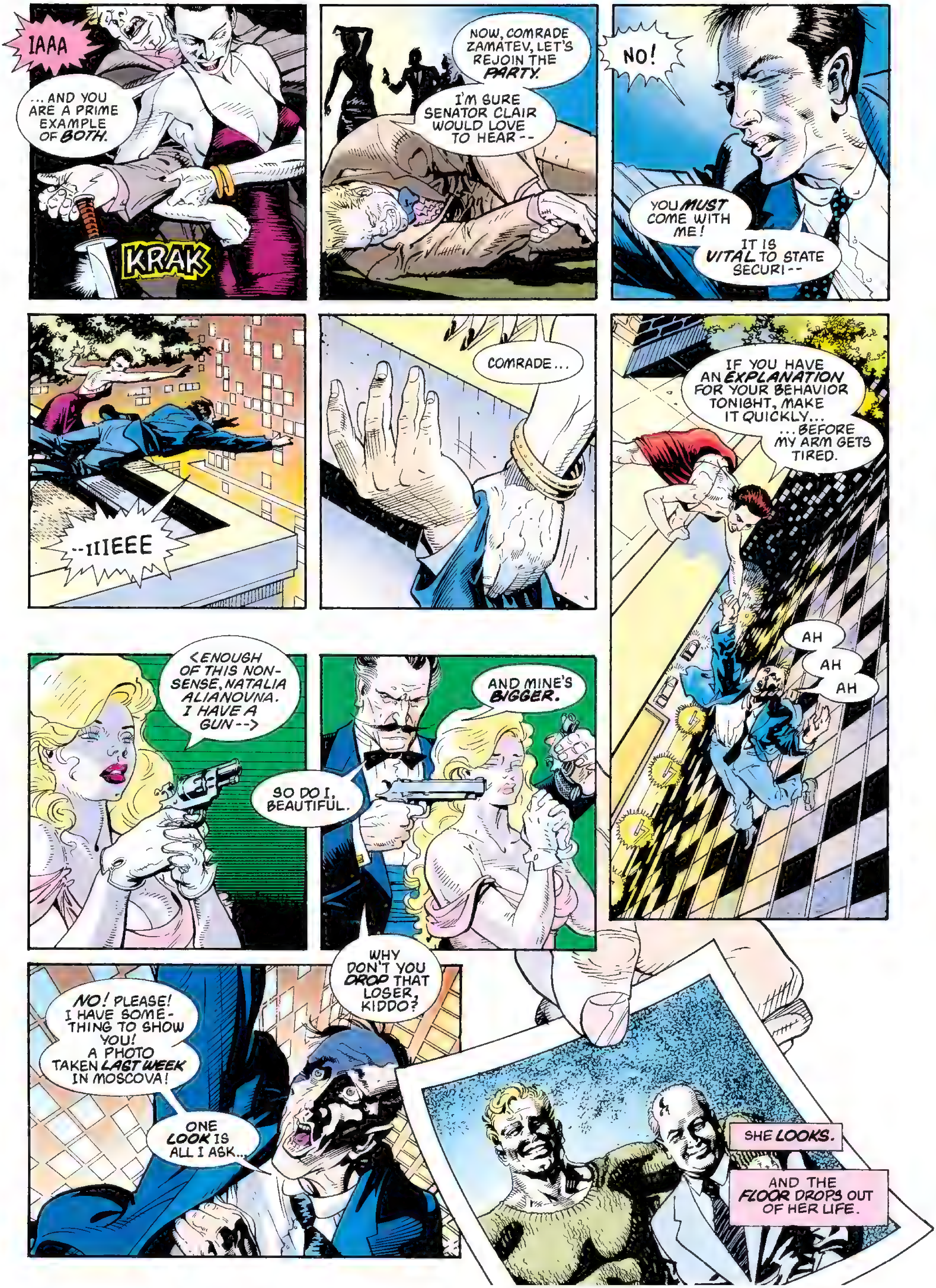

TAKE US TO SENATOR CLAIR'S RECEPTION DOWNTOWN, AND I'LL EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED WHILE I'M *DRESSING*.
TELL ME IT WASN'T A *SET-UP*.
IF IT WASN'T, IT FELT LIKE ONE.
WHEN COLONEL FURY ASKED ME TO RETRIEVE THAT COMPUTER DISK FOR S.H.I.E.L.D., HE SAID IT WAS A SIMPLE CASE OF *INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE*.
HE WAS *WRONG*. STERLING'S "CLIENTS" PLAY FOR KEEPS.
YOU THINK FURY KNEW WHAT HE WAS GETTING YOU INTO?
NO. EVEN *STERLING* SEEMED SURPRISED --BEFORE THEY KILLED HIM.
HM...
IVAN, WE HAVE COMPANY.
YOU MEAN THAT GRAY LIMO TAILING US?
I'VE BEEN WATCHING IT SINCE WE LEFT THE WEST SIDE HIGHWAY.
WANT ME TO *LOSE* HIM?
PLEASE.
MY PLEASURE.
VRRROOOM


<WHAT IS THAT OLD BEAR TRYING TO DO, GET US KILLED?>
<IF I KNOW IVAN PETROVITCH, KATRINKA-->
<--SUCH AN OUTCOME WOULD NOT UPSET HIM IN THE LEAST.>
<PETROVITCH SEES HIMSELF AS ROMANOVA'S GUARDIAN ANGEL.>
<ARE THEY LOVERS?
<MORE LIKE BROTHER AND SISTER -- OR FATHER AND DAUGHTER.>
SCREEEE
<PERHAPS WE SHOULD LET THEM GO. WE CAN INTERCEPT THEM LATER-->
<NO! WE HAVE ALREADY WASTED ENOUGH TIME OBSERVING THE ROMANOVA WOMAN.>
<TAKE THEM NOW!>
HANG ONTO YOUR TOWEL, 'TASHA.
I SPENT MOST 'A MY WEEKENDS FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS TUNING THIS BABY TILL SHE'S MORE SPORTSCAR THAN ROLLS.
SKROOM
LET'S SEE THAT LINCOLN MATCH THIS!


IVAN PETROVITCH, YOU WERE BORN WITH THE SOUL OF A *RUSSIAN*, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO NERVE BEHIND THE WHEEL, YOU ARE ALL *AMERICAN*.
THANK YOU, NATASHA.
I'M NOT CERTAIN IT'S A COMPLIMENT.
AH, SENATOR CLAIR'S...
KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR TROUBLE, IVAN, WHILE I LOCATE MY S.H.I.E.L.D. CONTACT--
ROLLS
--AND PLEASE--
--TRY NOT TO BE *CONSPICUOUS*.
CONSPICUOUS? I'M NOT THE ONE WEARING A $5,000 ARMANI ORIGINAL, BABE.
HM...
CONSIDER IT *CAMOUFLAGE*.
MINGLE, IVAN DEAR, HAVE FUN... AND WATCH OUT FOR HUNGRY WOMEN.
HI, BIG AND HANDSOME.
TELL ME, DOES YOUR MOUSTACHE TICKLE?
TELL ME FIRST--
--ARE YOU *HUNGRY*?

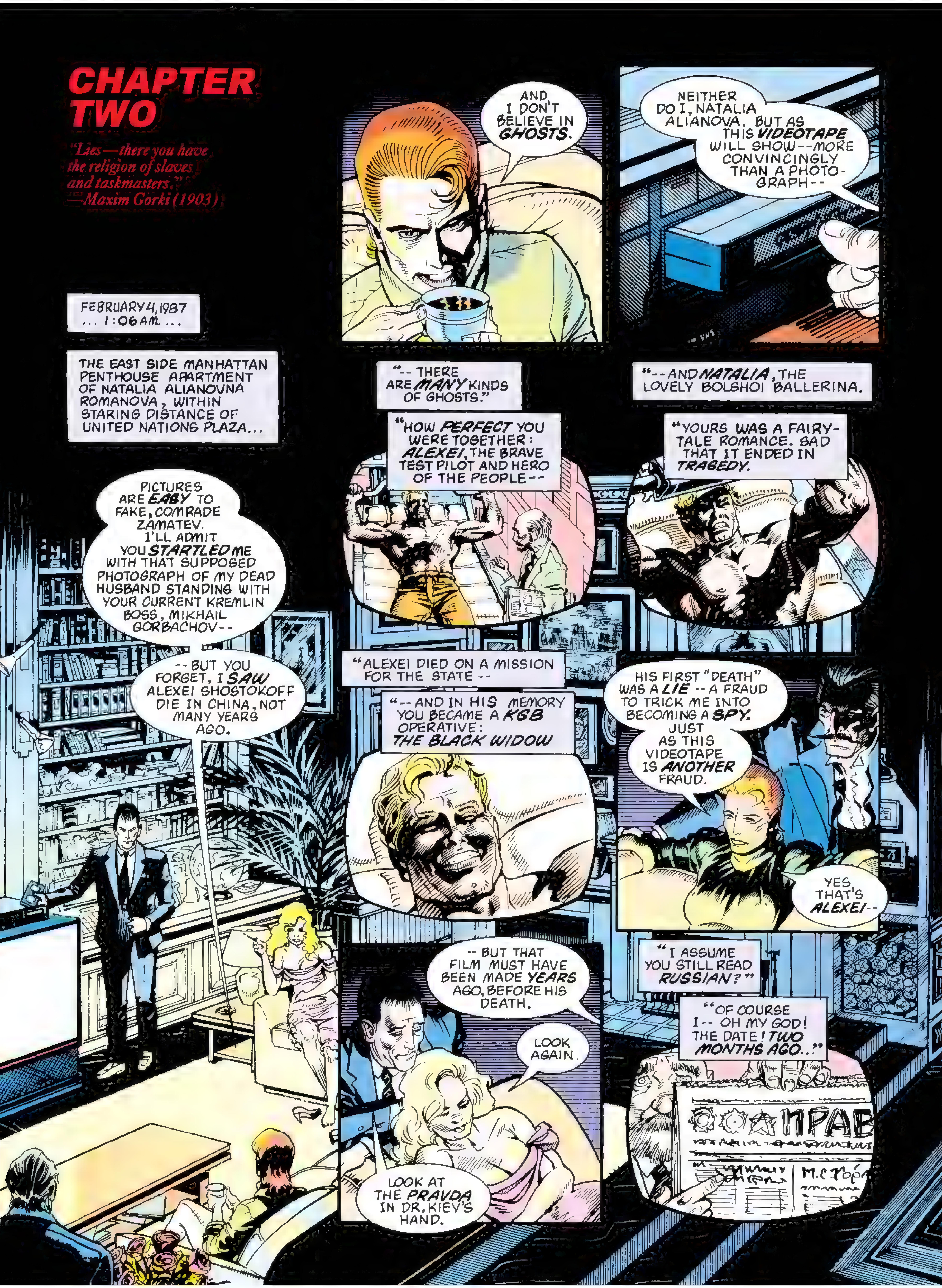

10:21 P.M...
...SO PLEASED YOU COULD JOIN US THIS EVENING, MS. ROMANOFF...
ALWAYS MY PLEASURE, SENATOR.
10:56 P.M...
ANOTHER DANCE, NATASHA?
SORRY, HENRY --I GAVE UP PUBLIC PERFORMING WHEN I QUIT THE BOLSHOI.
11:13 P.M...
LOVE YOUR GOWN, SYLVIA. ARMANI?
WHY, YES, NATASHA. AND YOURS?
11:38 P.M...
11:39 P.M...
11:44 P.M...
PERFUME, TISSUE, COLOGNE?
NO THANKS.
11:46 P.M...
I THOUGHT THAT GIRL WOULD NEVER LEAVE.
TELL NICK FURY HE OWES ME FOR THIS ONE.
YOU HAD TROUBLE?
NOTHING I COULDN'T HANDLE.
<GREETINGS, COMRADE.>

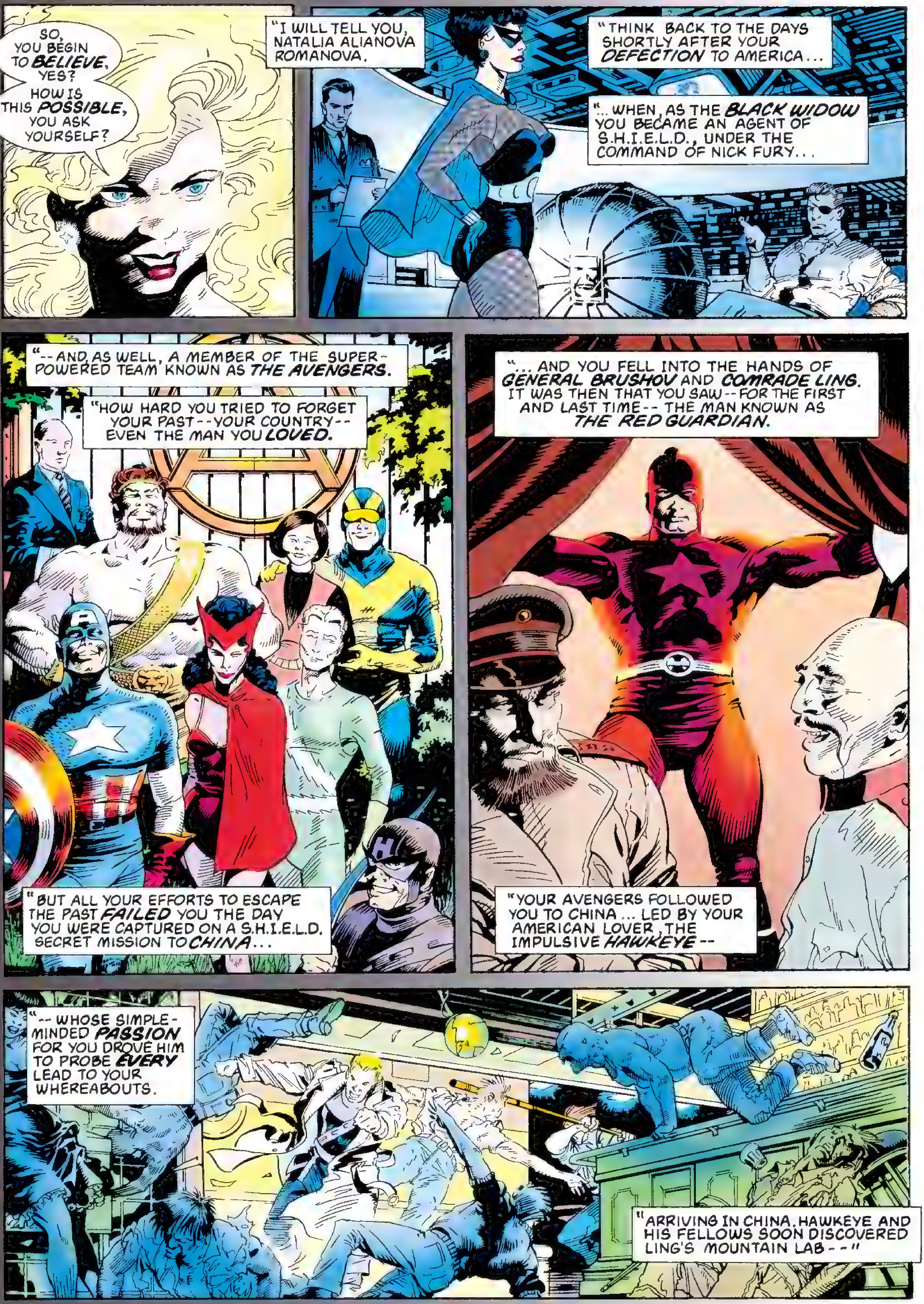

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE YOU?
<I AM ZAMATEV. THIS IS KATRINKA. WE ARE COMRADES FROM YOUR HOMELAND.>
<FORGIVE US FOR APPROACHING YOU SO LATE IN THE EVENING, BUT WE HAD ...CAR TROUBLE-->
<NO MORE CAT-AND-MOUSE, ZAMATEV.>
<FYODOR, ANDRE--TAKE HER.>
TAKE ME?
OOPH
AAK
COMRADES, YOU CLAIM TO KNOW ME--
--BUT IF YOU IMAGINE THESE TWO OVER-SIZED SIBERIAN WEASELS CAN TAKE ME ANYWHERE--
GROAN
AAAAAA
--YOU HARDLY KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH.
<COMRADE ZAMATEV WANTS YOU ALIVE.>
KRUNCH
<BUT ZAMATEV IS NOT KGB AS AM I. TO KGB YOU ARE A TRAITOR --AND WE DO NOT CARE HOW YOU COME WITH US.>
<PERHAPS WE EVEN PREFER YOU DEAD.>
KGB? I'M NOT SURPRISED.
THE KGB IS STAFFED WITH THUGS AND FOOLS...

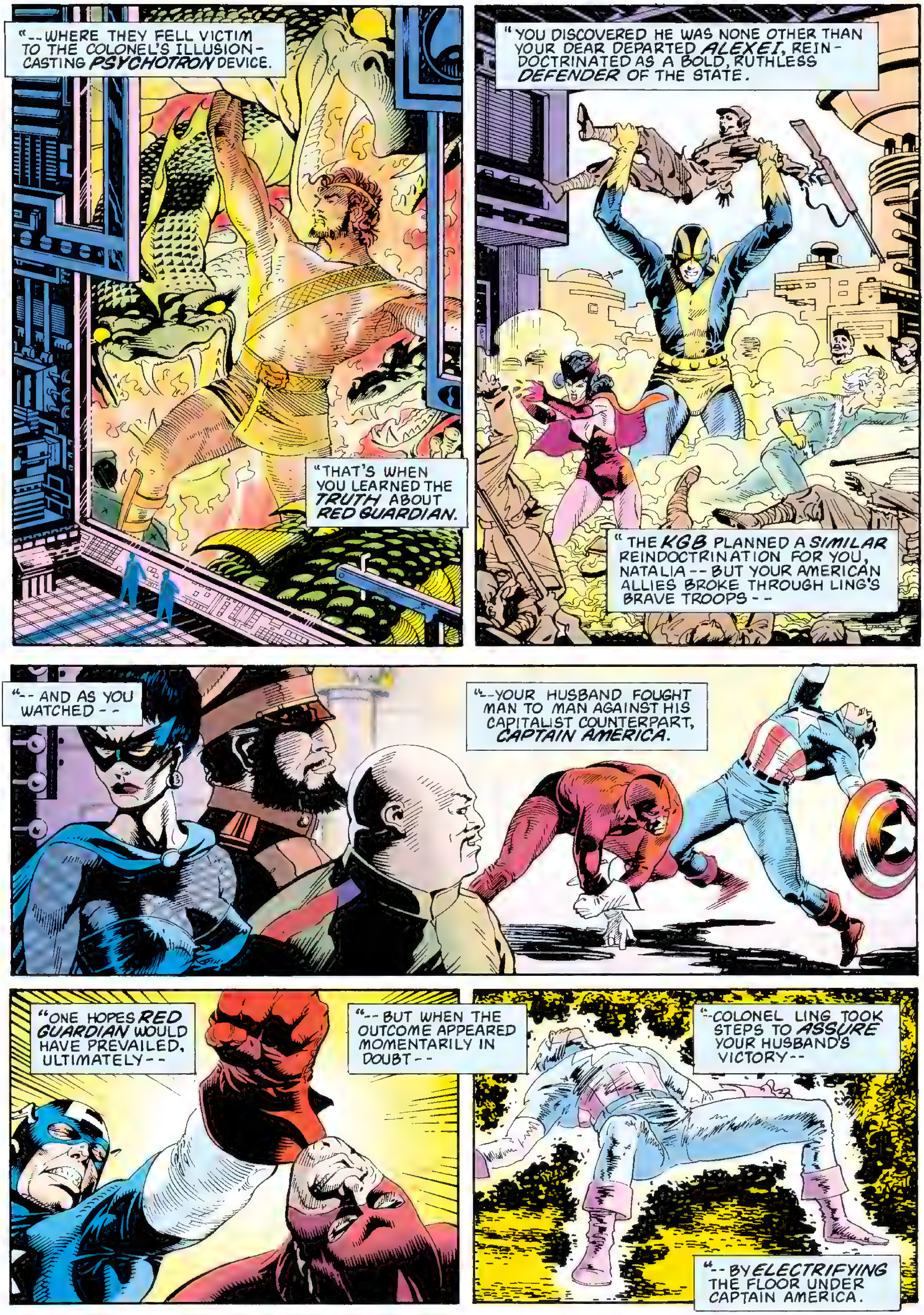

IAAA
...AND YOU ARE A PRIME EXAMPLE OF *BOTH*.
KRAK
NOW, COMRADE ZAMATEV, LET'S REJOIN THE *PARTY*.
I'M SURE SENATOR CLAIR WOULD LOVE TO HEAR--
NO!
YOU *MUST* COME WITH ME!
IT IS *VITAL* TO STATE SECURI--
--IIIEEE
COMRADE...
IF YOU HAVE AN *EXPLANATION* FOR YOUR BEHAVIOR TONIGHT, MAKE IT QUICKLY...
...BEFORE MY ARM GETS TIRED.
AH
AH
AH
<ENOUGH OF THIS NONSENSE, NATALIA ALIANOVNA. I HAVE A GUN-->
SO DO I, BEAUTIFUL.
AND MINE'S *BIGGER*.
WHY DON'T YOU *DROP* THAT LOSER, KIDDO?
NO! PLEASE! I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU! A PHOTO TAKEN *LAST WEEK* IN MOSCOVA!
ONE *LOOK* IS ALL I ASK...
SHE *LOOKS*.
AND THE *FLOOR* DROPS OUT OF HER LIFE.

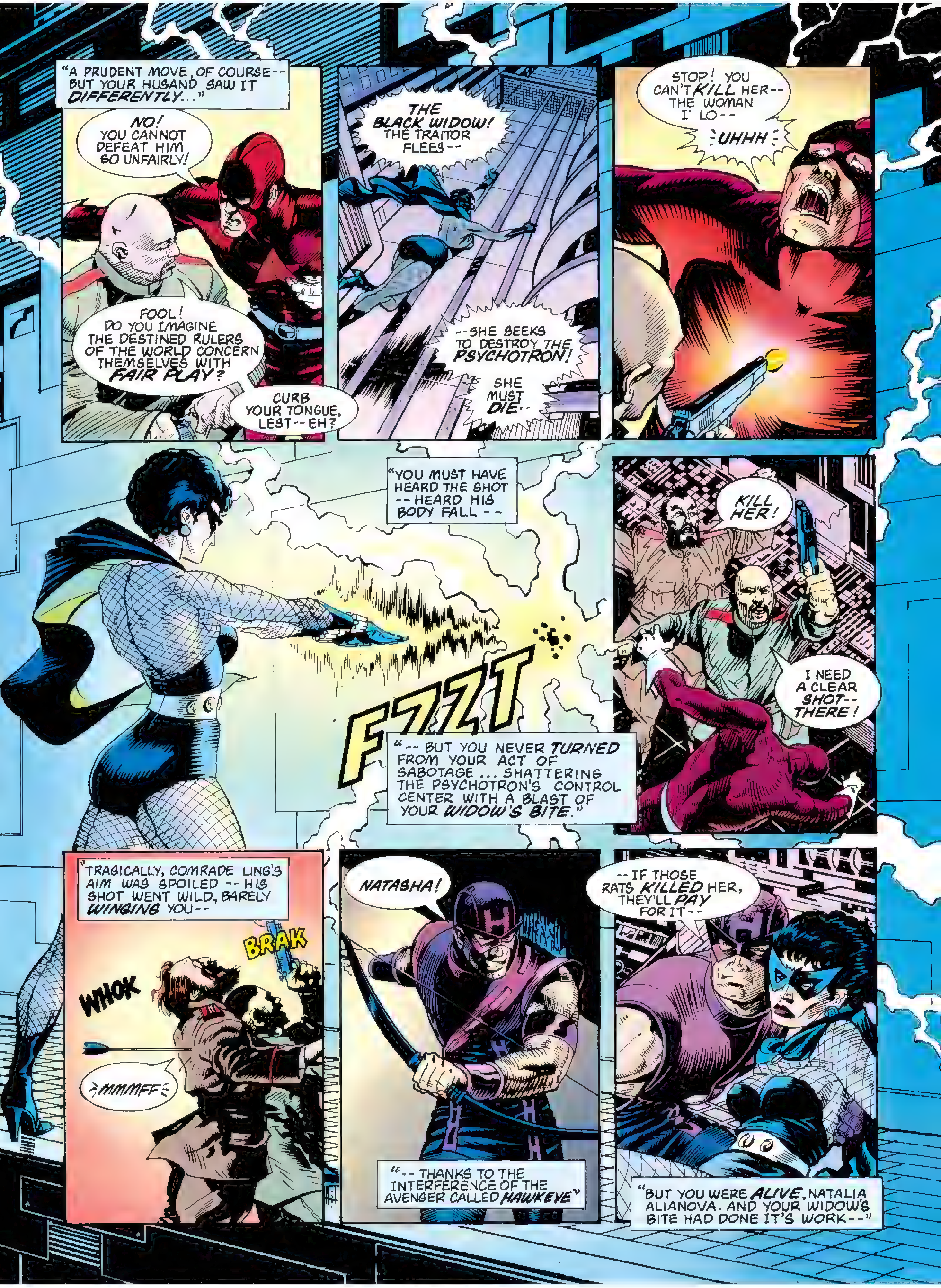
CHAPTER TWO

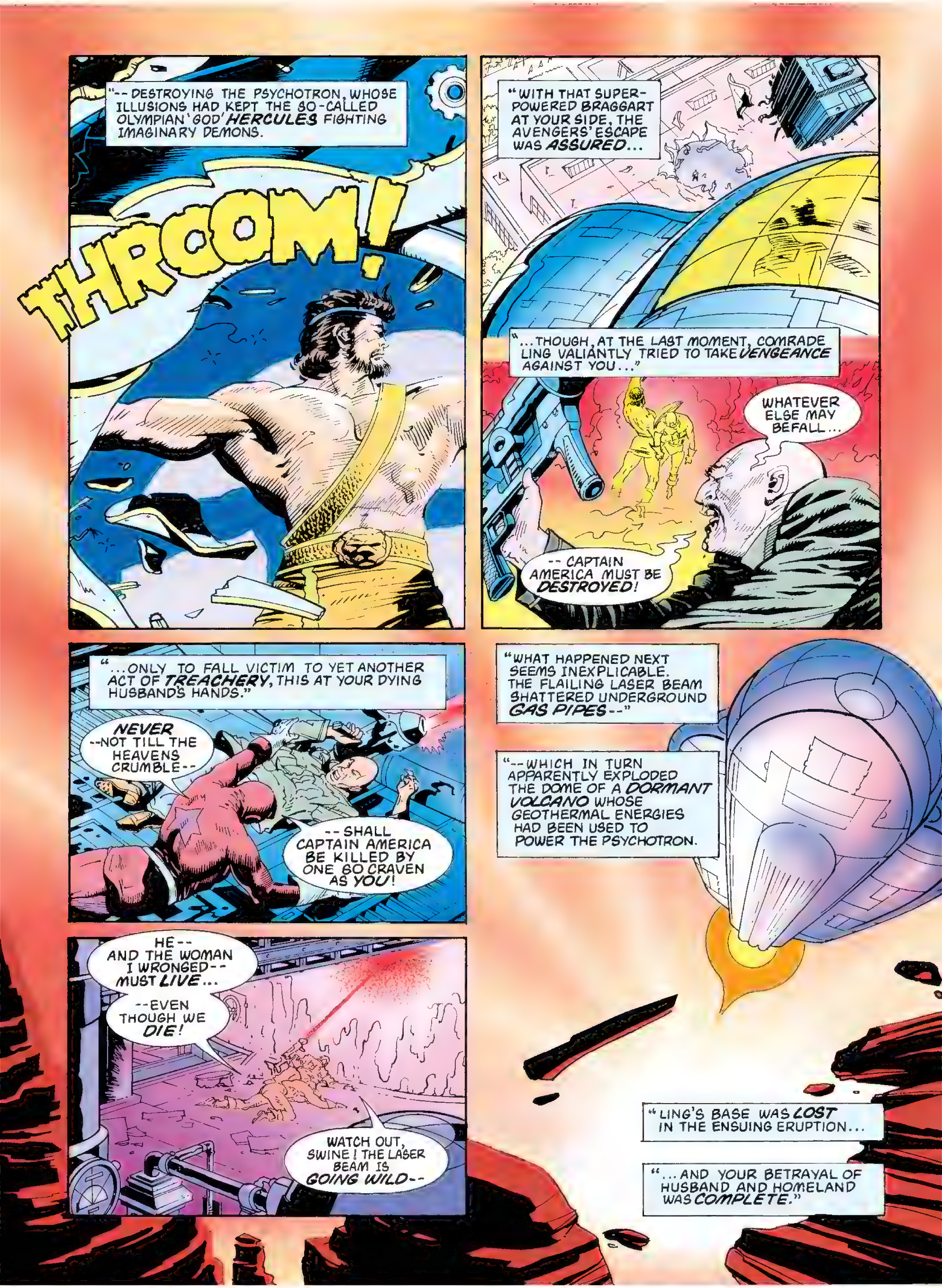
"Lies—there you have the religion of slaves and taskmasters."
—Maxim Gorki (1903)

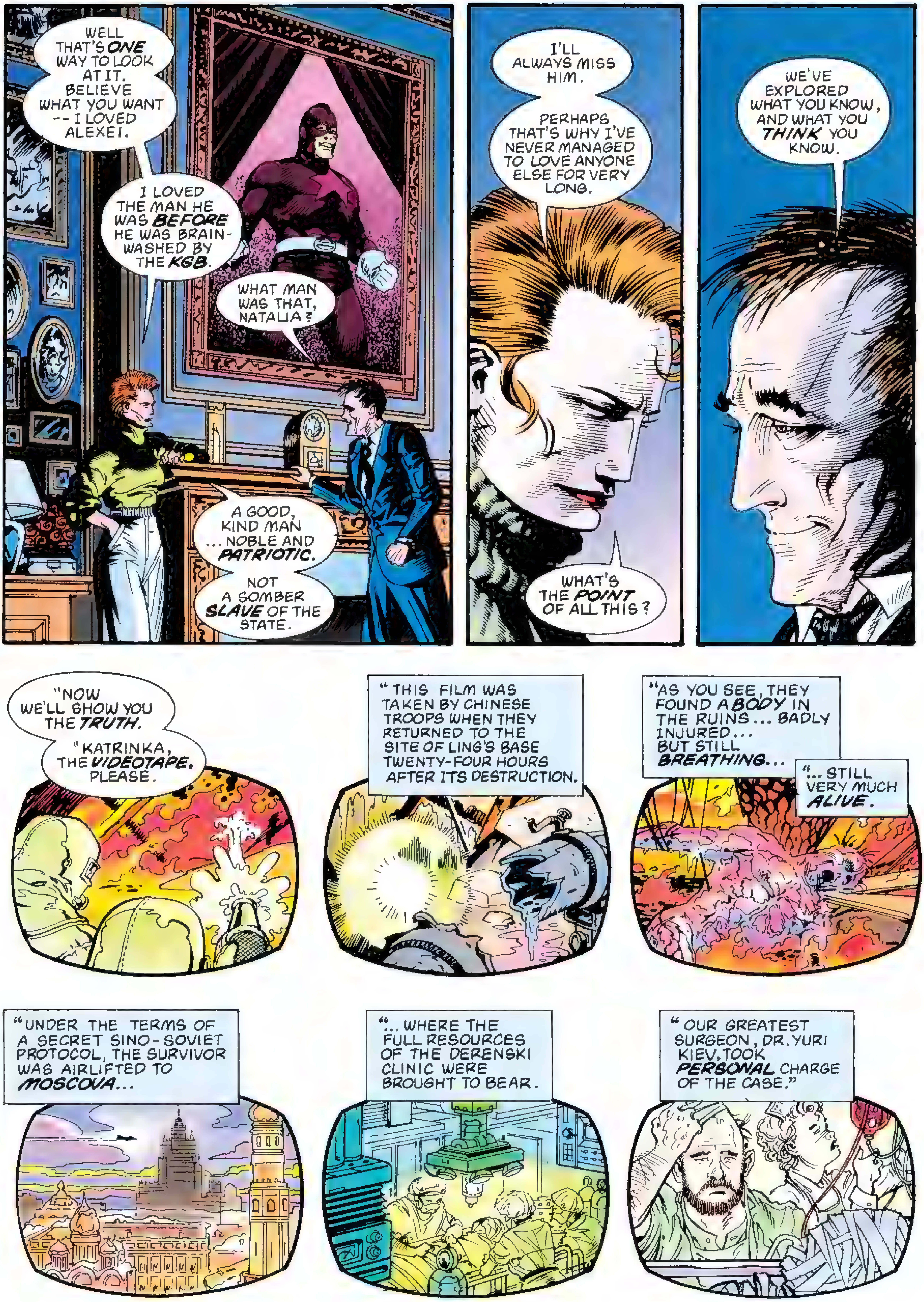

FEBRUARY 4, 1987 ... 1:06 AM. ...
THE EAST SIDE MANHATTAN PENTHOUSE APARTMENT OF NATALIA ALIANOVNA ROMANOVA, WITHIN STARING DISTANCE OF UNITED NATIONS PLAZA...
PICTURES ARE *EASY* TO FAKE, COMRADE ZAMATEV. I'LL ADMIT YOU *STARTLED* ME WITH THAT SUPPOSED PHOTOGRAPH OF MY DEAD HUSBAND STANDING WITH YOUR CURRENT KREMLIN BOSS, MIKHAIL GORBACHOV--
--BUT YOU FORGET, I *SAW* ALEXEI SHOSTOKOFF DIE IN CHINA, NOT MANY YEARS AGO.
AND I DON'T BELIEVE IN *GHOSTS*.
NEITHER DO I, NATALIA ALIANOVA. BUT AS THIS *VIDEOTAPE* WILL SHOW--MORE CONVINCINGLY THAN A PHOTOGRAPH--
"--THERE ARE *MANY* KINDS OF GHOSTS."
"HOW *PERFECT* YOU WERE TOGETHER: *ALEXEI*, THE BRAVE TEST PILOT AND HERO OF THE PEOPLE--
"--AND *NATALIA*, THE LOVELY BOLSHOI BALLERINA.
"YOURS WAS A FAIRY-TALE ROMANCE. BAD THAT IT ENDED IN *TRAGEDY*.
"ALEXEI DIED ON A MISSION FOR THE STATE--
"--AND IN HIS MEMORY YOU BECAME A *KGB* OPERATIVE: *THE BLACK WIDOW*
HIS FIRST "DEATH" WAS A *LIE*--A FRAUD TO TRICK ME INTO BECOMING A *SPY*.
JUST AS THIS VIDEOTAPE IS *ANOTHER* FRAUD.
YES, THAT'S *ALEXEI*--
--BUT THAT FILM MUST HAVE BEEN MADE *YEARS* AGO, BEFORE HIS DEATH.
LOOK AGAIN.
LOOK AT THE *PRAVDA* IN DR. KIEV'S HAND.
"I ASSUME YOU STILL READ *RUSSIAN*?"
"OF COURSE I--OH MY GOD! THE DATE! *TWO MONTHS AGO*..."
ПРАВ

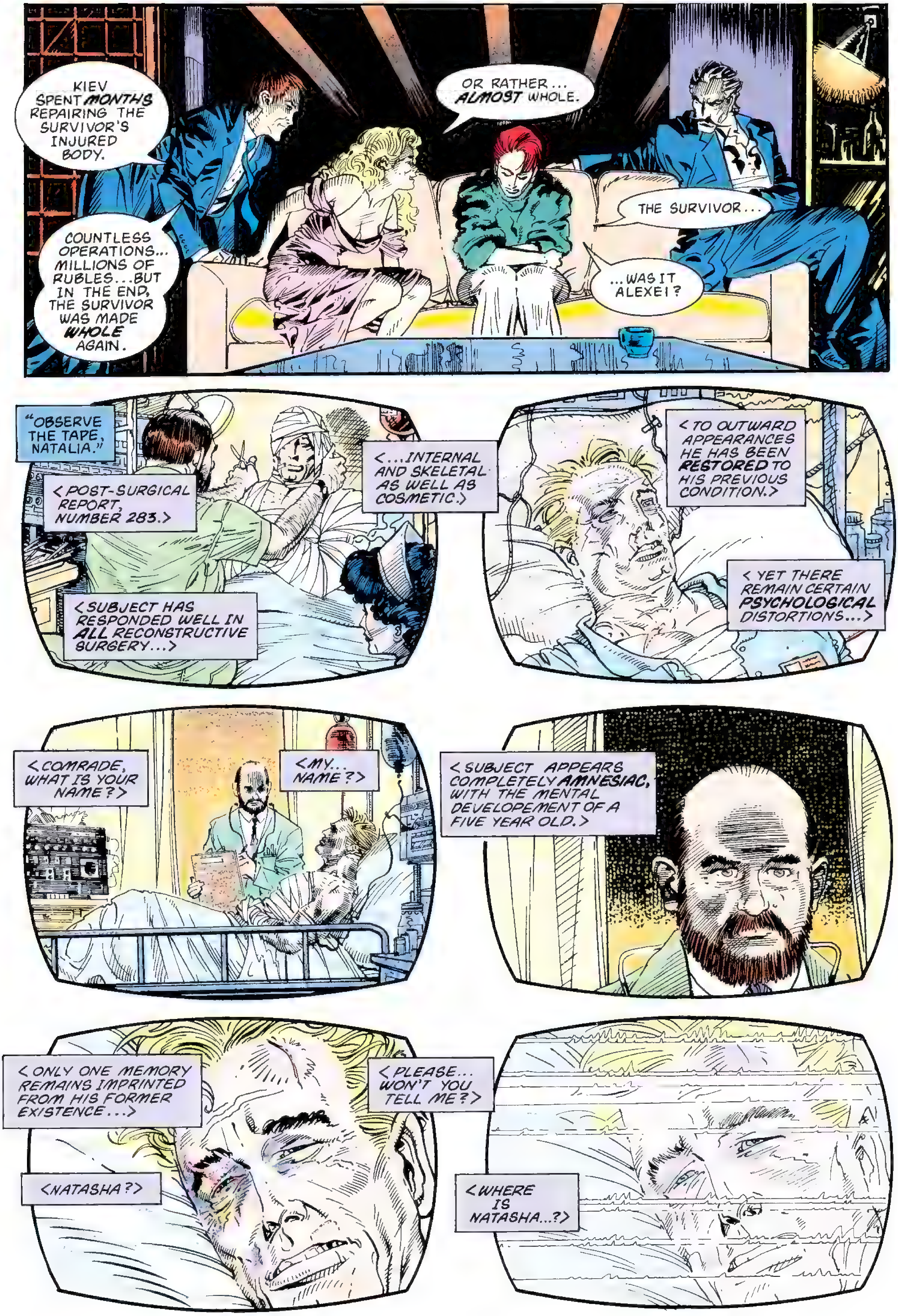

SO, YOU BEGIN TO BELIEVE, YES? HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE, YOU ASK YOURSELF?
"I WILL TELL YOU, NATALIA ALIANOVA ROMANOVA.
"THINK BACK TO THE DAYS SHORTLY AFTER YOUR DEFECTION TO AMERICA...
"...WHEN, AS THE BLACK WIDOW YOU BECAME AN AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D., UNDER THE COMMAND OF NICK FURY...
"--AND, AS WELL, A MEMBER OF THE SUPER-POWERED TEAM KNOWN AS THE AVENGERS.
"HOW HARD YOU TRIED TO FORGET YOUR PAST--YOUR COUNTRY--EVEN THE MAN YOU LOVED.
"BUT ALL YOUR EFFORTS TO ESCAPE THE PAST FAILED YOU THE DAY YOU WERE CAPTURED ON A S.H.I.E.L.D. SECRET MISSION TO CHINA...
"...AND YOU FELL INTO THE HANDS OF GENERAL BRUSHOV AND COMRADE LING. IT WAS THEN THAT YOU SAW--FOR THE FIRST AND LAST TIME--THE MAN KNOWN AS THE RED GUARDIAN.
"YOUR AVENGERS FOLLOWED YOU TO CHINA... LED BY YOUR AMERICAN LOVER, THE IMPULSIVE HAWKEYE--
"--WHOSE SIMPLE-MINDED PASSION FOR YOU DROVE HIM TO PROBE EVERY LEAD TO YOUR WHEREABOUTS.
"ARRIVING IN CHINA, HAWKEYE AND HIS FELLOWS SOON DISCOVERED LING'S MOUNTAIN LAB--"

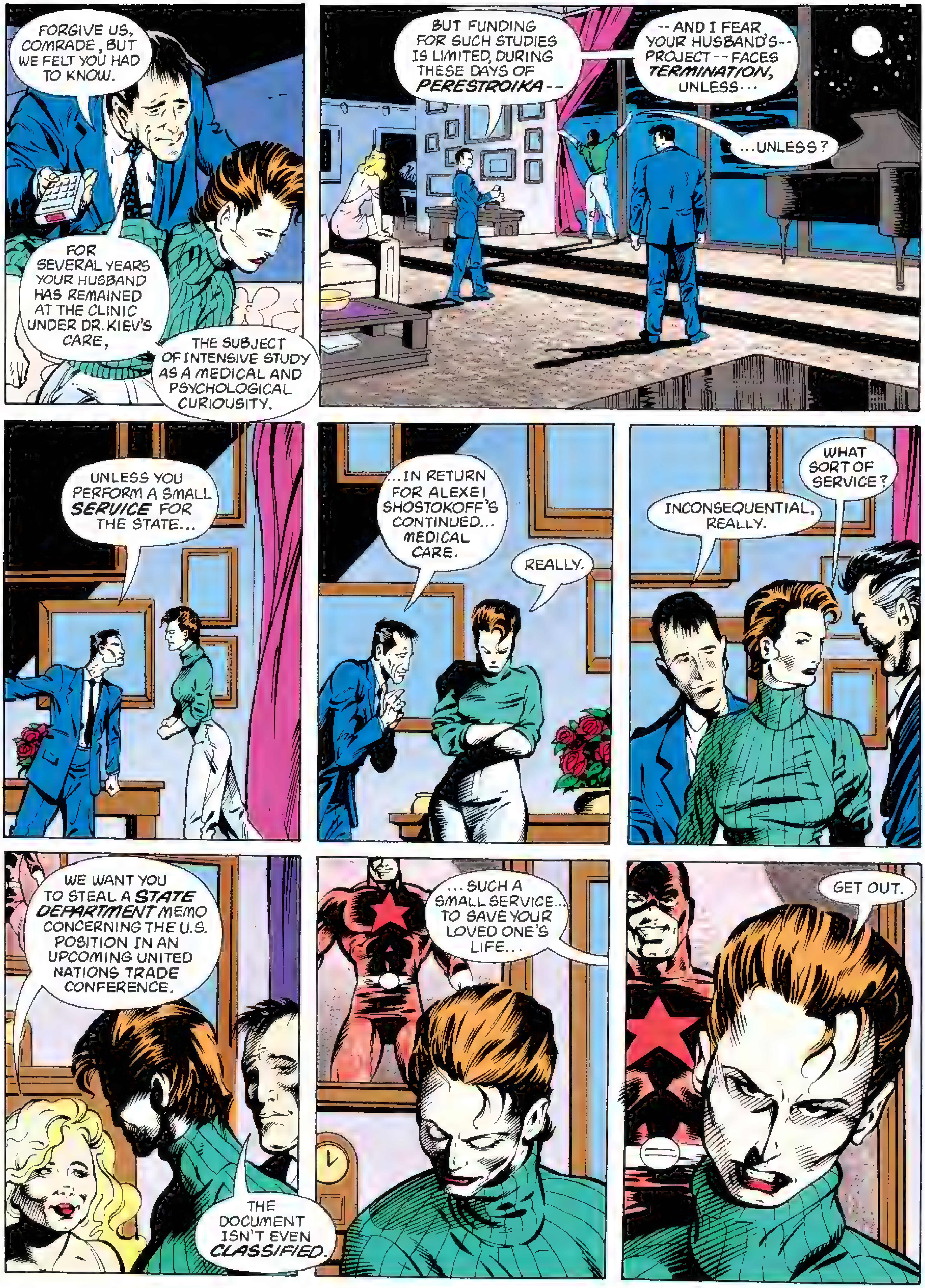

"--WHERE THEY FELL VICTIM TO THE COLONEL'S ILLUSION-CASTING *PSYCHOTRON* DEVICE.
"THAT'S WHEN YOU LEARNED THE *TRUTH* ABOUT *RED GUARDIAN*.
"YOU DISCOVERED HE WAS NONE OTHER THAN YOUR DEAR DEPARTED *ALEXEI*, REINDOCTRINATED AS A BOLD, RUTHLESS *DEFENDER* OF THE STATE.
"THE *KGB* PLANNED A *SIMILAR* REINDOCTRINATION FOR YOU, NATALIA -- BUT YOUR AMERICAN ALLIES BROKE THROUGH LING'S BRAVE TROOPS --
"-- AND AS YOU WATCHED --
"--YOUR HUSBAND FOUGHT MAN TO MAN AGAINST HIS CAPITALIST COUNTERPART, *CAPTAIN AMERICA*.
"ONE HOPES *RED GUARDIAN* WOULD HAVE PREVAILED, ULTIMATELY --
"-- BUT WHEN THE OUTCOME APPEARED MOMENTARILY IN DOUBT --
"--COLONEL LING TOOK STEPS TO *ASSURE* YOUR HUSBAND'S VICTORY--
"-- BY *ELECTRIFYING* THE FLOOR UNDER CAPTAIN AMERICA.

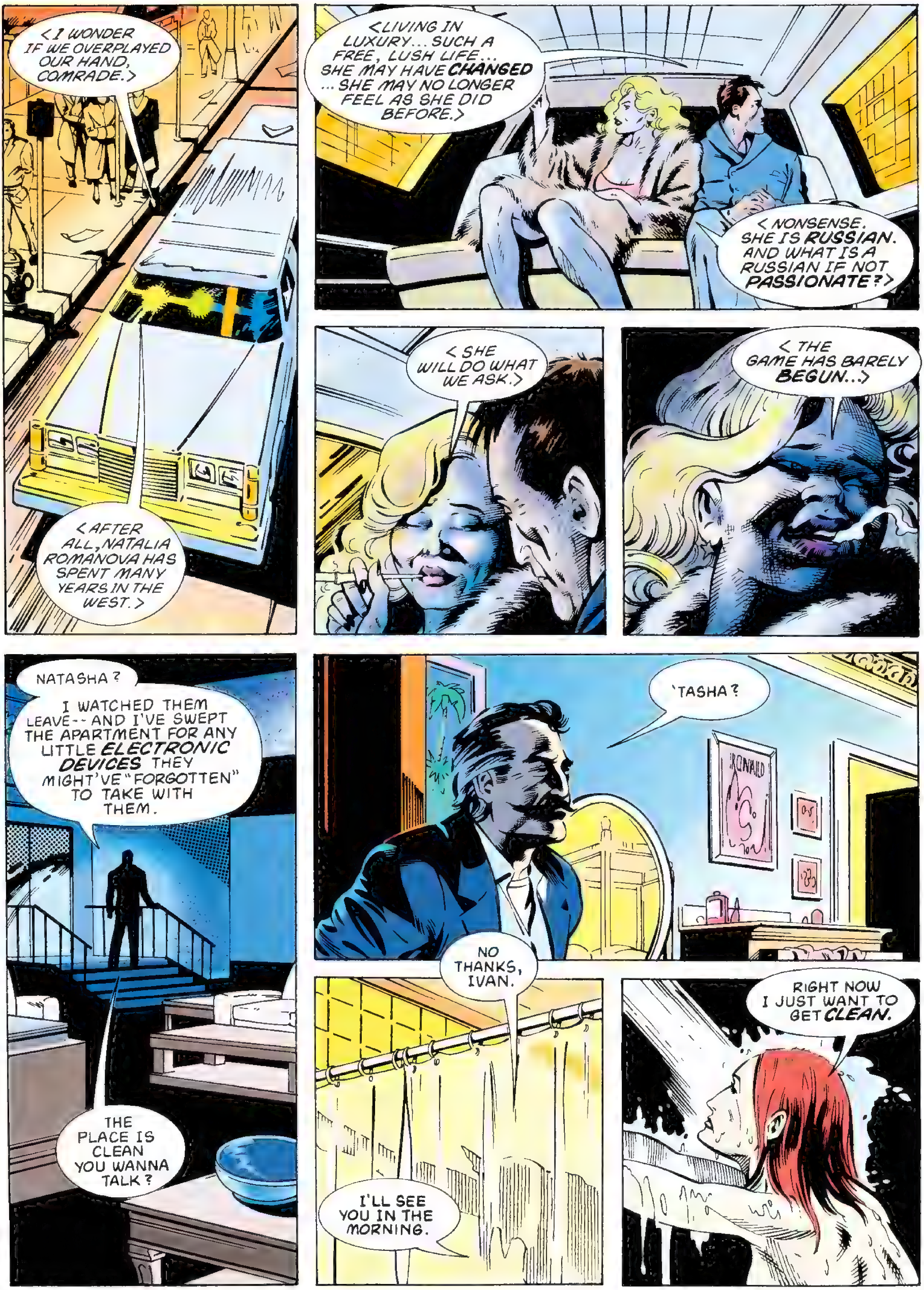

"A PRUDENT MOVE, OF COURSE-- BUT YOUR HUSAND SAW IT DIFFERENTLY..."
NO! YOU CANNOT DEFEAT HIM SO UNFAIRLY!
FOOL! DO YOU IMAGINE THE DESTINED RULERS OF THE WORLD CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH FAIR PLAY?
CURB YOUR TONGUE, LEST--EH?
THE BLACK WIDOW! THE TRAITOR FLEES--
--SHE SEEKS TO DESTROY THE PSYCHOTRON!
SHE MUST DIE.
STOP! YOU CAN'T KILL HER-- THE WOMAN I' LO--
UHHH
"YOU MUST HAVE HEARD THE SHOT --HEARD HIS BODY FALL --
FZZT
"--BUT YOU NEVER TURNED FROM YOUR ACT OF SABOTAGE ... SHATTERING THE PSYCHOTRON'S CONTROL CENTER WITH A BLAST OF YOUR WIDOW'S BITE."
KILL HER!
I NEED A CLEAR SHOT-- THERE!
"TRAGICALLY, COMRADE LING'S AIM WAS SPOILED --HIS SHOT WENT WILD, BARELY WINGING YOU--
BRAK
WHOK
MMMFF
NATASHA!
"--THANKS TO THE INTERFERENCE OF THE AVENGER CALLED HAWKEYE"
--IF THOSE RATS KILLED HER, THEY'LL PAY FOR IT--
"BUT YOU WERE ALIVE, NATALIA ALIANOVA. AND YOUR WIDOW'S BITE HAD DONE IT'S WORK--"

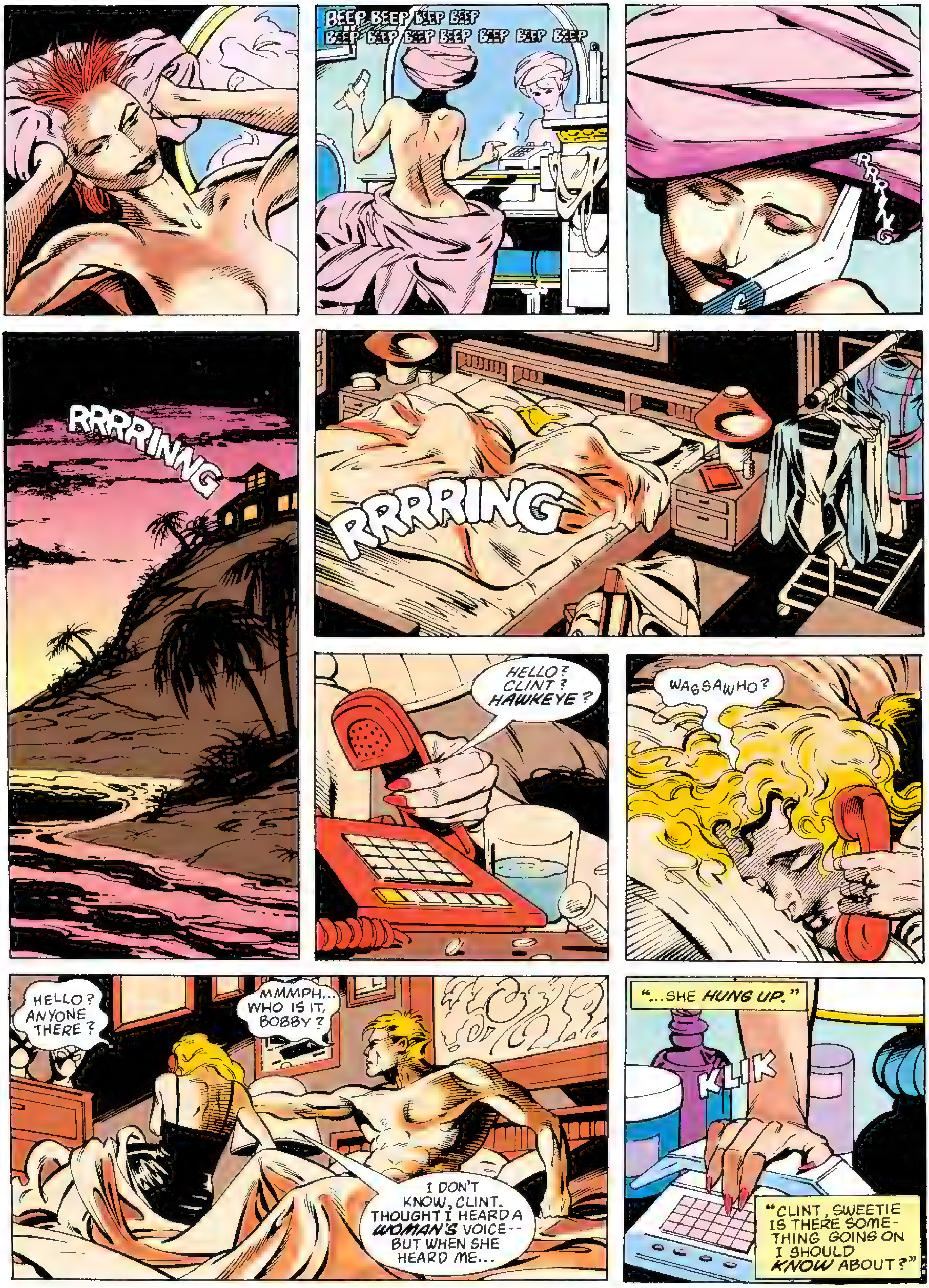

"--DESTROYING THE PSYCHOTRON, WHOSE ILLUSIONS HAD KEPT THE SO-CALLED OLYMPIAN 'GOD' ***HERCULES*** FIGHTING IMAGINARY DEMONS.
THROOM!
"WITH THAT SUPER-POWERED BRAGGART AT YOUR SIDE, THE AVENGERS' ESCAPE WAS ***ASSURED***...
"...THOUGH, AT THE LAST MOMENT, COMRADE LING VALIANTLY TRIED TO TAKE ***VENGEANCE*** AGAINST YOU..."
WHATEVER ELSE MAY BEFALL...
--CAPTAIN AMERICA MUST BE ***DESTROYED!***
"...ONLY TO FALL VICTIM TO YET ANOTHER ACT OF ***TREACHERY,*** THIS AT YOUR DYING HUSBAND'S HANDS."
NEVER --NOT TILL THE HEAVENS CRUMBLE--
--SHALL CAPTAIN AMERICA BE KILLED BY ONE SO CRAVEN AS ***YOU!***
"WHAT HAPPENED NEXT SEEMS INEXPLICABLE. THE FLAILING LASER BEAM SHATTERED UNDERGROUND ***GAS PIPES***--"
"--WHICH IN TURN APPARENTLY EXPLODED THE DOME OF A ***DORMANT VOLCANO*** WHOSE GEOTHERMAL ENERGIES HAD BEEN USED TO POWER THE PSYCHOTRON.
HE--AND THE WOMAN I WRONGED--MUST ***LIVE***...
--EVEN THOUGH WE ***DIE!***
WATCH OUT, SWINE! THE LASER BEAM IS ***GOING WILD***--
"LING'S BASE WAS ***LOST*** IN THE ENSUING ERUPTION...
"...AND YOUR BETRAYAL OF HUSBAND AND HOMELAND WAS ***COMPLETE.***"

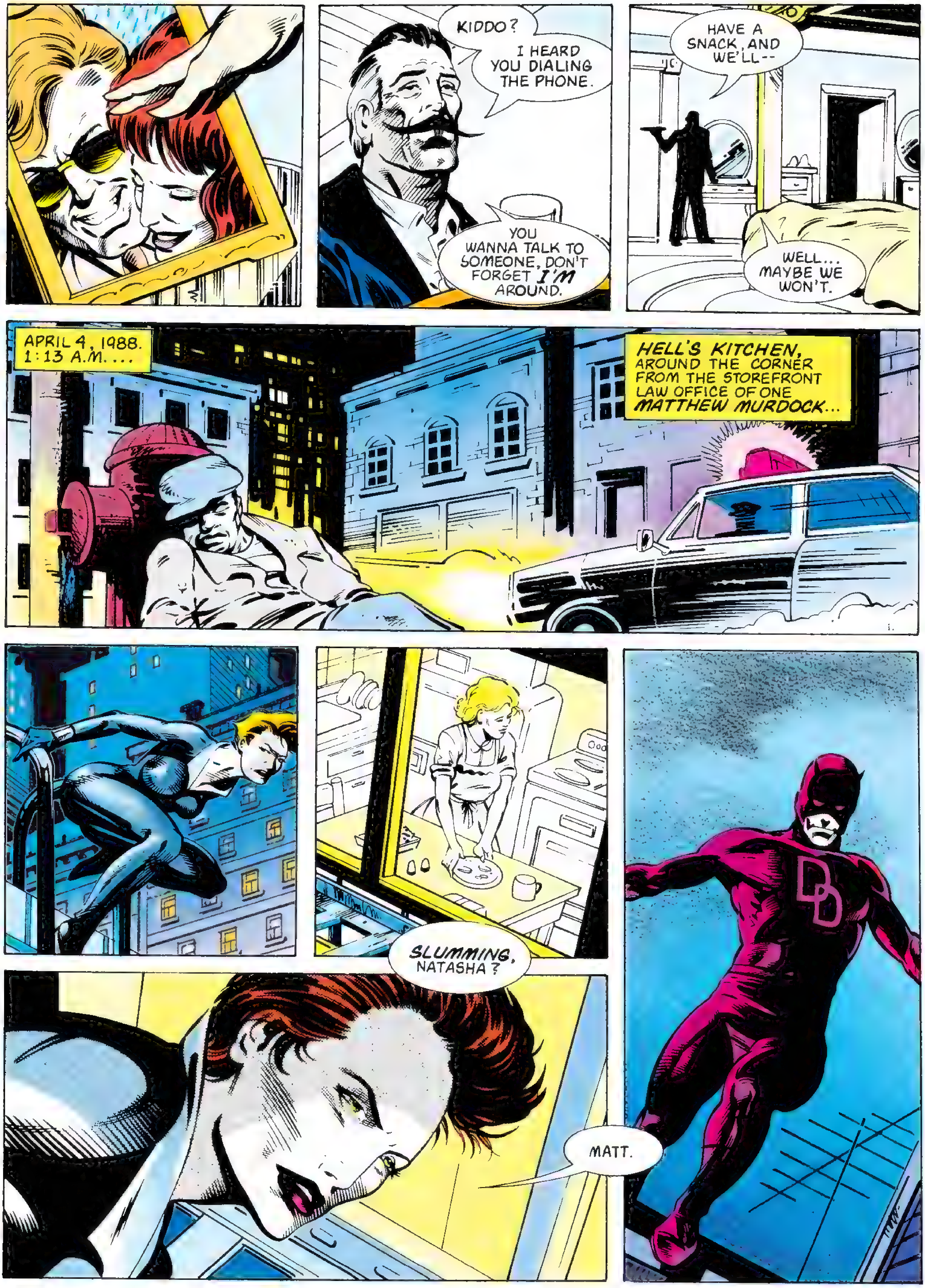

WELL THAT'S *ONE* WAY TO LOOK AT IT. BELIEVE WHAT YOU WANT -- I LOVED ALEXEI.
I LOVED THE MAN HE WAS *BEFORE* HE WAS BRAINWASHED BY THE *KGB*.
WHAT MAN WAS THAT, NATALIA?
A GOOD, KIND MAN ...NOBLE AND *PATRIOTIC*.
NOT A SOMBER *SLAVE* OF THE STATE.
I'LL ALWAYS MISS HIM.
PERHAPS THAT'S WHY I'VE NEVER MANAGED TO LOVE ANYONE ELSE FOR VERY LONG.
WHAT'S THE *POINT* OF ALL THIS?
WE'VE EXPLORED WHAT YOU KNOW, AND WHAT YOU *THINK* YOU KNOW.
"NOW WE'LL SHOW YOU THE *TRUTH*.
"KATRINKA, THE *VIDEOTAPE*, PLEASE.
"THIS FILM WAS TAKEN BY CHINESE TROOPS WHEN THEY RETURNED TO THE SITE OF LING'S BASE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS AFTER ITS DESTRUCTION.
"AS YOU SEE, THEY FOUND A *BODY* IN THE RUINS... BADLY INJURED... BUT STILL *BREATHING*...
"... STILL VERY MUCH *ALIVE*.
"UNDER THE TERMS OF A SECRET SINO-SOVIET PROTOCOL, THE SURVIVOR WAS AIRLIFTED TO *MOSCOVA*...
"... WHERE THE FULL RESOURCES OF THE DERENSKI CLINIC WERE BROUGHT TO BEAR.
"OUR GREATEST SURGEON, DR. YURI KIEV, TOOK *PERSONAL* CHARGE OF THE CASE."

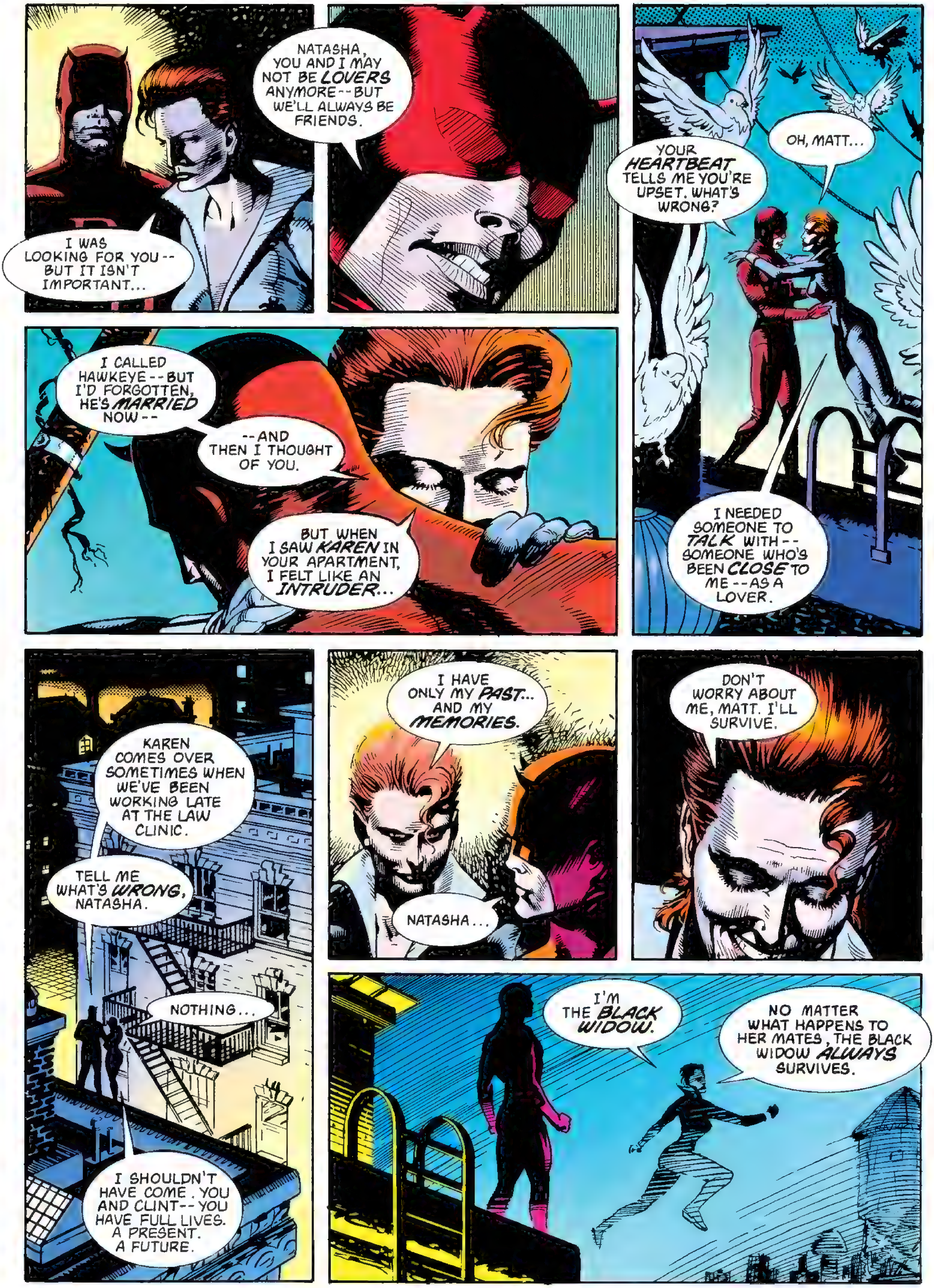

KIEV SPENT *MONTHS* REPAIRING THE SURVIVOR'S INJURED BODY.
COUNTLESS OPERATIONS... MILLIONS OF RUBLES...BUT IN THE END, THE SURVIVOR WAS MADE *WHOLE* AGAIN.
OR RATHER... *ALMOST* WHOLE.
THE SURVIVOR...
...WAS IT ALEXEI?
"OBSERVE THE TAPE, NATALIA."
<POST-SURGICAL REPORT, NUMBER 283.>
<...INTERNAL AND SKELETAL AS WELL AS COSMETIC.>
<SUBJECT HAS RESPONDED WELL IN *ALL* RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY...>
<TO OUTWARD APPEARANCES HE HAS BEEN *RESTORED* TO HIS PREVIOUS CONDITION.>
<YET THERE REMAIN CERTAIN *PSYCHOLOGICAL* DISTORTIONS...>
<COMRADE, WHAT IS YOUR NAME?>
<MY... NAME?>
<SUBJECT APPEARS COMPLETELY *AMNESIAC*, WITH THE MENTAL DEVELOPEMENT OF A FIVE YEAR OLD.>
<ONLY ONE MEMORY REMAINS IMPRINTED FROM HIS FORMER EXISTENCE...>
<PLEASE... WON'T YOU TELL ME?>
<NATASHA?>
<WHERE IS NATASHA...?>

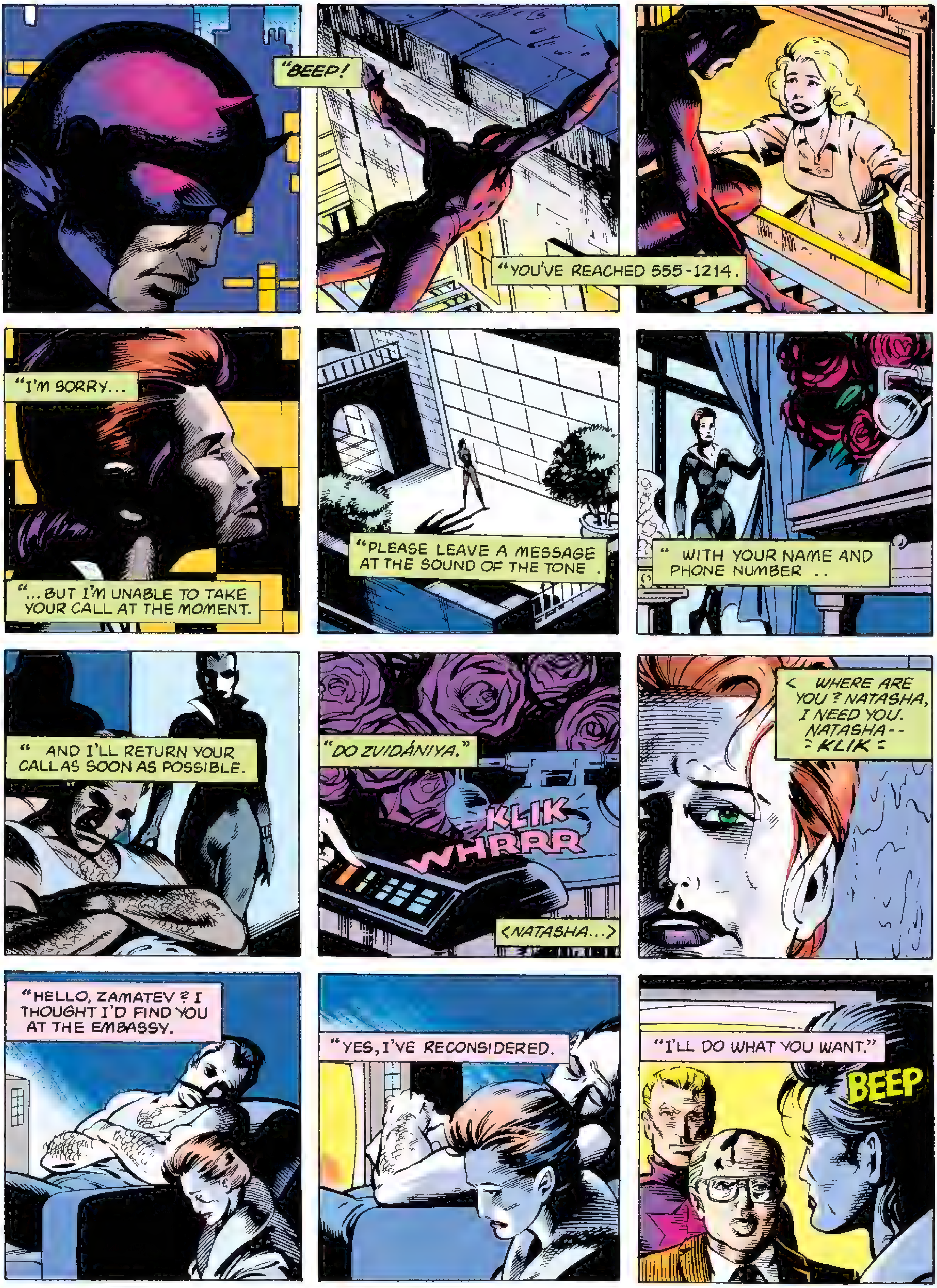

FORGIVE US, COMRADE, BUT WE FELT YOU HAD TO KNOW.
FOR SEVERAL YEARS YOUR HUSBAND HAS REMAINED AT THE CLINIC UNDER DR. KIEV'S CARE,
THE SUBJECT OF INTENSIVE STUDY AS A MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CURIOUSITY.
BUT FUNDING FOR SUCH STUDIES IS LIMITED, DURING THESE DAYS OF **PERESTROIKA**--
--AND I FEAR YOUR HUSBAND'S--PROJECT--FACES ***TERMINATION,*** UNLESS...
...UNLESS?
UNLESS YOU PERFORM A SMALL ***SERVICE*** FOR THE STATE...
...IN RETURN FOR ALEXEI SHOSTOKOFF'S CONTINUED... MEDICAL CARE.
REALLY.
WHAT SORT OF SERVICE?
INCONSEQUENTIAL, REALLY.
WE WANT YOU TO STEAL A ***STATE DEPARTMENT*** MEMO CONCERNING THE U.S. POSITION IN AN UPCOMING UNITED NATIONS TRADE CONFERENCE.
THE DOCUMENT ISN'T EVEN ***CLASSIFIED.***
...SUCH A SMALL SERVICE... TO SAVE YOUR LOVED ONE'S LIFE...
GET OUT.


<I WONDER IF WE OVERPLAYED OUR HAND, COMRADE.>
<AFTER ALL, NATALIA ROMANOVA HAS SPENT MANY YEARS IN THE WEST.>
<LIVING IN LUXURY... SUCH A FREE, LUSH LIFE... SHE MAY HAVE **CHANGED** ... SHE MAY NO LONGER FEEL AS SHE DID BEFORE.>
< NONSENSE. SHE IS **RUSSIAN**. AND WHAT IS A RUSSIAN IF NOT **PASSIONATE**?>
< SHE WILL DO WHAT WE ASK.>
< THE GAME HAS BARELY **BEGUN**...>
NATASHA?
I WATCHED THEM LEAVE-- AND I'VE SWEPT THE APARTMENT FOR ANY LITTLE **ELECTRONIC DEVICES** THEY MIGHT'VE "FORGOTTEN" TO TAKE WITH THEM.
THE PLACE IS CLEAN YOU WANNA TALK?
'TASHA?
RONALD
NO THANKS, IVAN.
I'LL SEE YOU IN THE MORNING.
RIGHT NOW I JUST WANT TO GET **CLEAN**.


BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP
BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP
RRRING
RRRRINNG
RRRRING
HELLO? CLINT? HAWKEYE?
WAGSAWHO?
HELLO? ANYONE THERE?
MMMPH... WHO IS IT, BOBBY?
I DON'T KNOW, CLINT. THOUGHT I HEARD A WOMAN'S VOICE-- BUT WHEN SHE HEARD ME...
"...SHE HUNG UP."
KLIK
"CLINT, SWEETIE IS THERE SOMETHING GOING ON I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?"

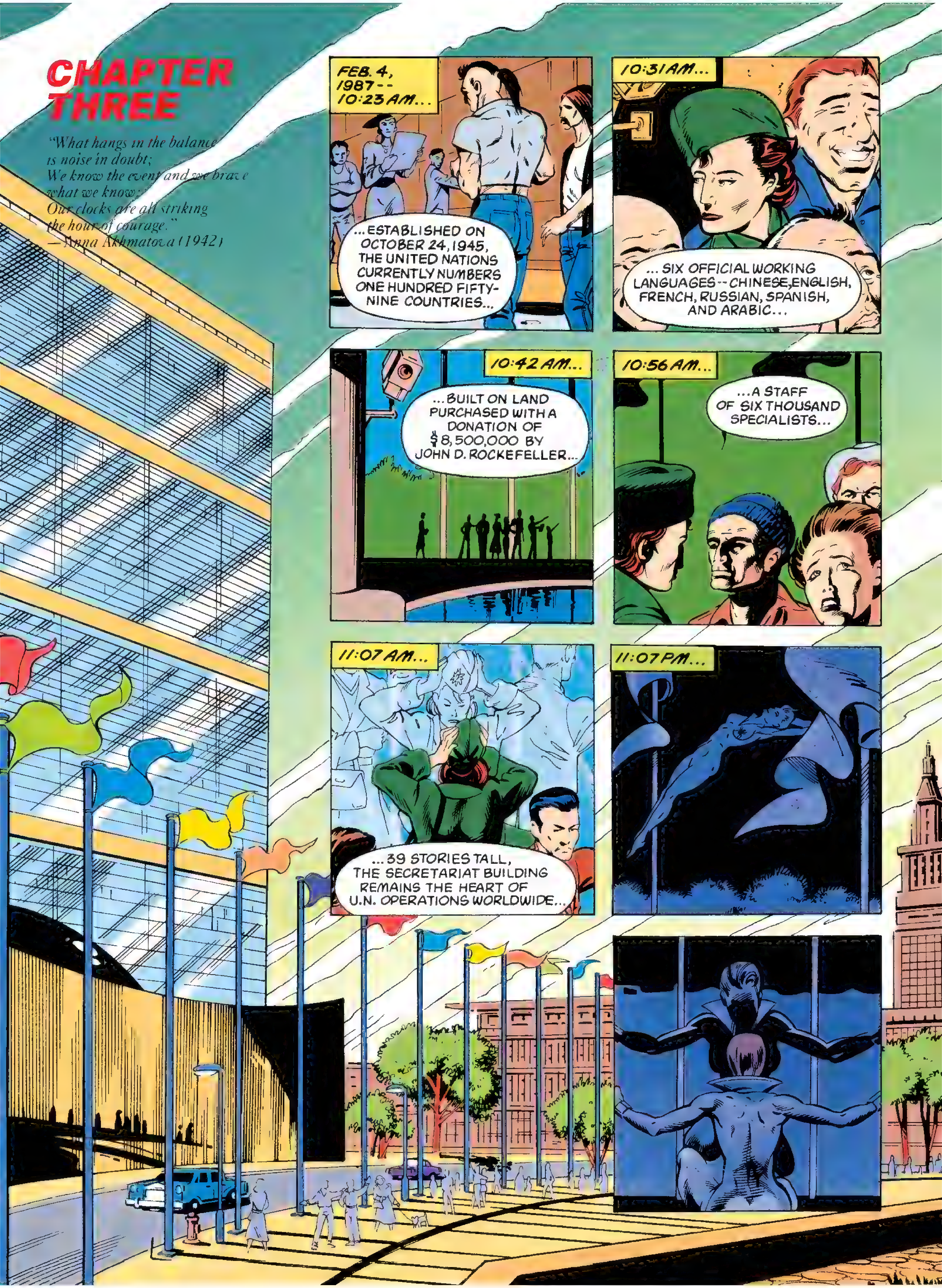

KIDDO?
I HEARD YOU DIALING THE PHONE.
YOU WANNA TALK TO SOMEONE, DON'T FORGET *I'M* AROUND.
HAVE A SNACK, AND WE'LL--
WELL... MAYBE WE WON'T.
APRIL 4, 1988. 1:13 A.M....
HELL'S KITCHEN, AROUND THE CORNER FROM THE STOREFRONT LAW OFFICE OF ONE *MATTHEW MURDOCK...*
SLUMMING, NATASHA?
MATT.

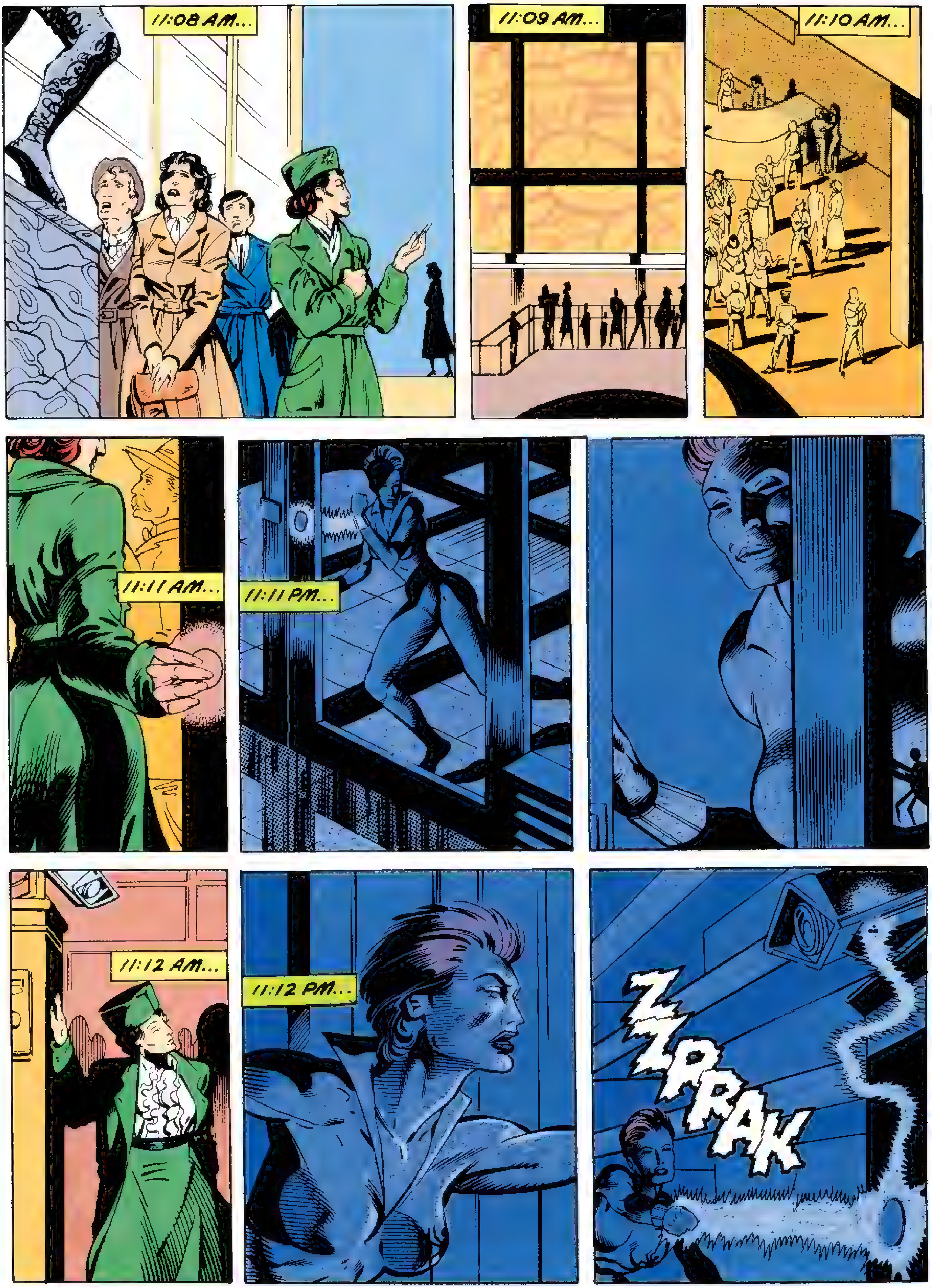

I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU -- BUT IT ISN'T IMPORTANT...
NATASHA, YOU AND I MAY NOT BE *LOVERS* ANYMORE -- BUT WE'LL ALWAYS BE FRIENDS.
YOUR *HEARTBEAT* TELLS ME YOU'RE UPSET. WHAT'S WRONG?
OH, MATT...
I CALLED HAWKEYE -- BUT I'D FORGOTTEN, HE'S *MARRIED* NOW --
-- AND THEN I THOUGHT OF YOU.
BUT WHEN I SAW *KAREN* IN YOUR APARTMENT, I FELT LIKE AN *INTRUDER*...
I NEEDED SOMEONE TO *TALK* WITH -- SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN *CLOSE* TO ME -- AS A LOVER.
KAREN COMES OVER SOMETIMES WHEN WE'VE BEEN WORKING LATE AT THE LAW CLINIC.
TELL ME WHAT'S *WRONG*, NATASHA.
NOTHING...
I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME. YOU AND CLINT -- YOU HAVE FULL LIVES. A PRESENT. A FUTURE.
I HAVE ONLY MY *PAST*... AND MY *MEMORIES*.
NATASHA...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, MATT. I'LL SURVIVE.
I'M THE *BLACK WIDOW*.
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO HER MATES, THE BLACK WIDOW *ALWAYS* SURVIVES.

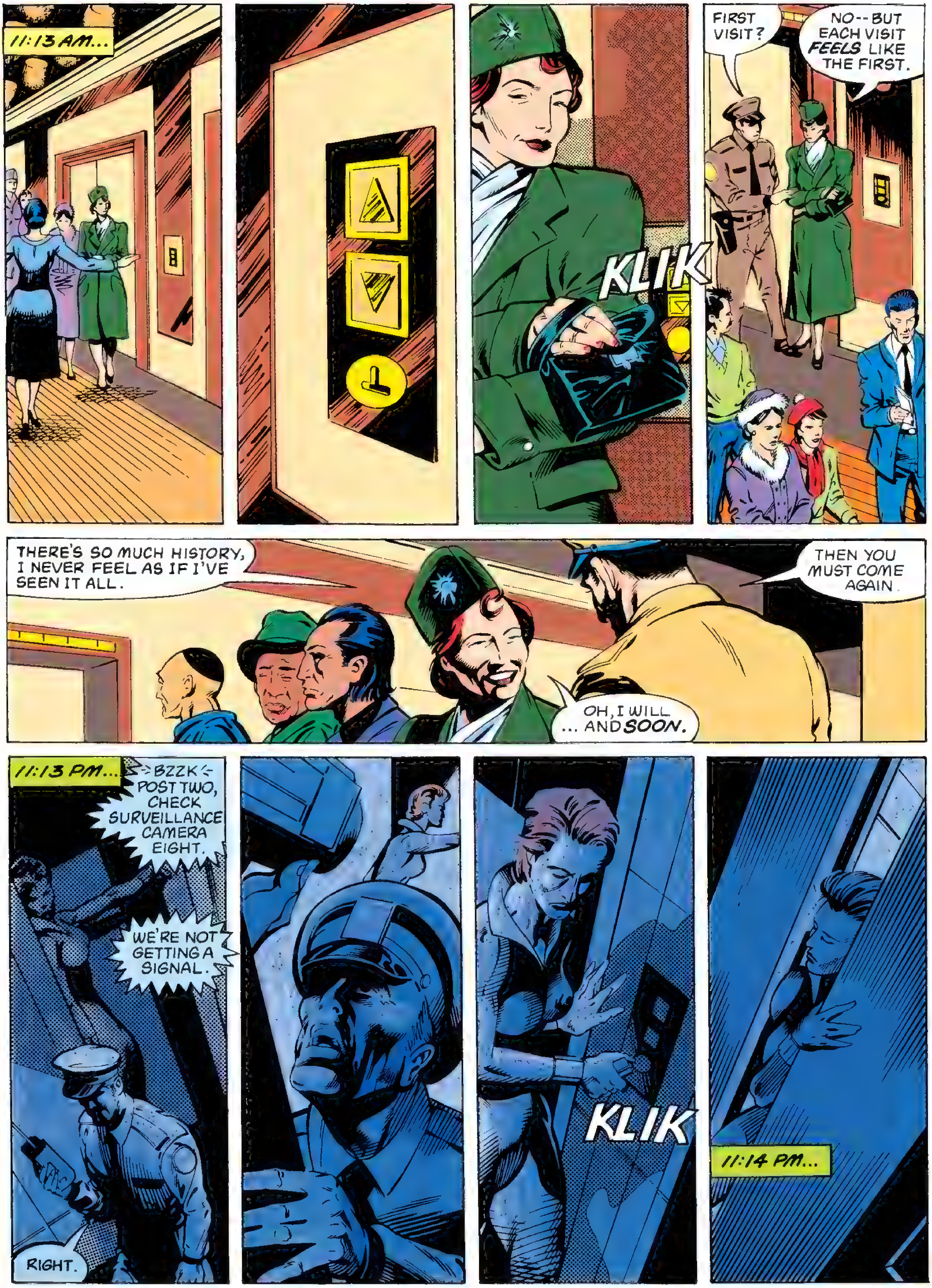

"BEEP!
"YOU'VE REACHED 555-1214.
"I'M SORRY...
"...BUT I'M UNABLE TO TAKE YOUR CALL AT THE MOMENT.
"PLEASE LEAVE A MESSAGE AT THE SOUND OF THE TONE.
" WITH YOUR NAME AND PHONE NUMBER ..
" AND I'LL RETURN YOUR CALL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
"DO ZVIDÁNIYA."
KLIK
WHRRR
<NATASHA...>
< WHERE ARE YOU? NATASHA, I NEED YOU. NATASHA-- =KLIK=
"HELLO, ZAMATEV? I THOUGHT I'D FIND YOU AT THE EMBASSY.
"YES, I'VE RECONSIDERED.
"I'LL DO WHAT YOU WANT."
BEEP

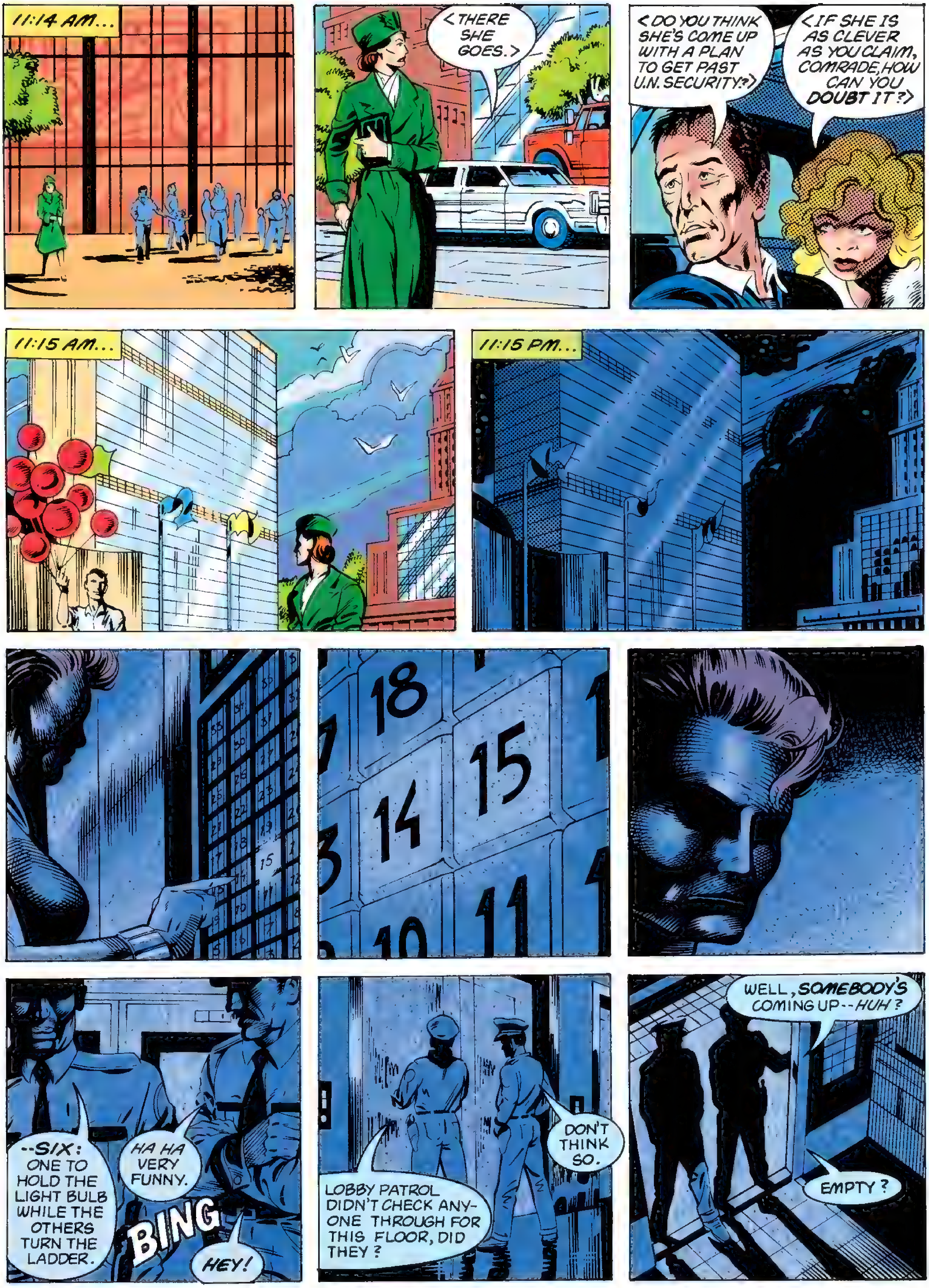
CHAPTER THREE

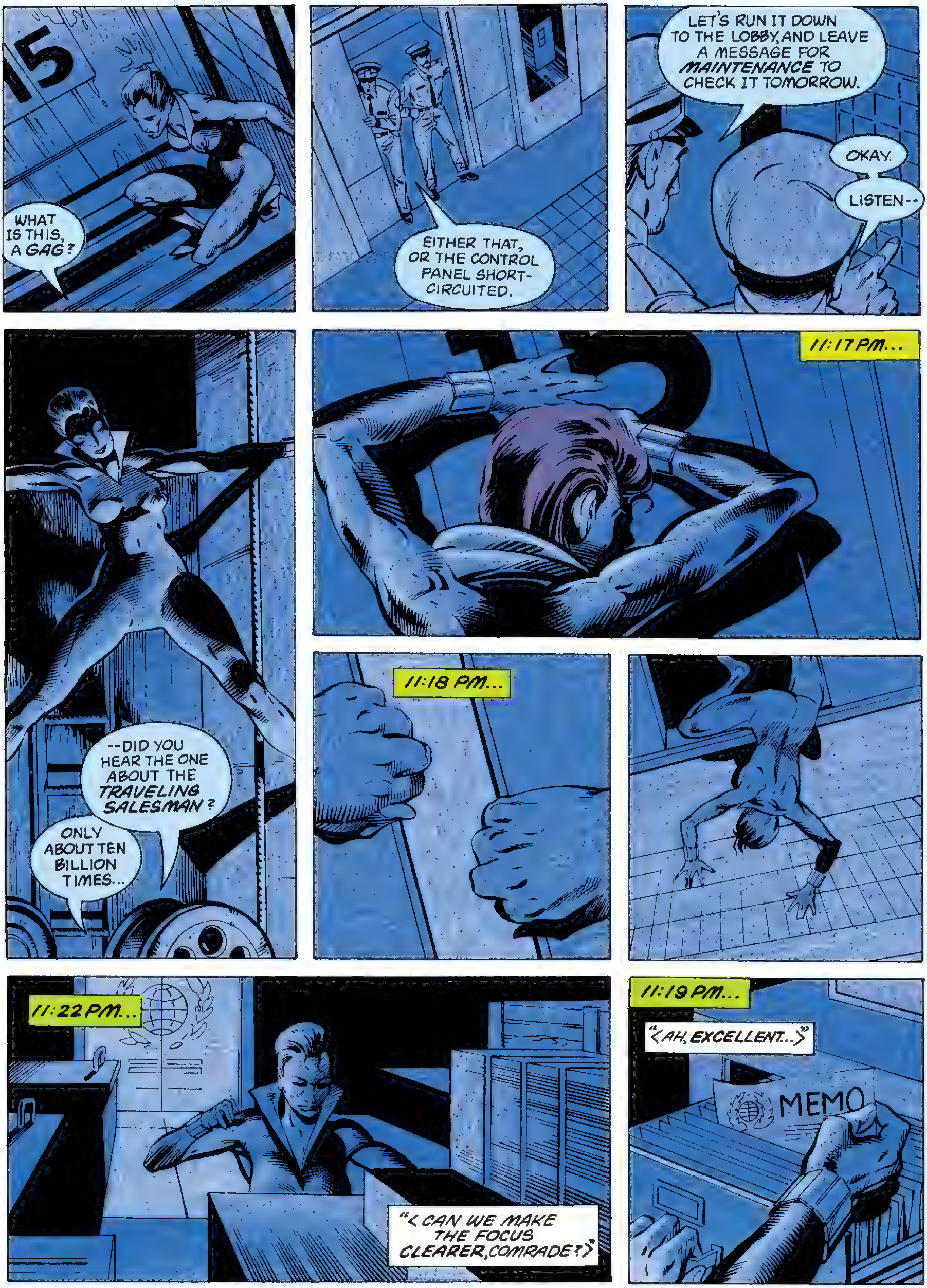
"What hangs in the balance
is noise in doubt;
We know the event and we brave
what we know:
Our clocks are all striking
the hour of courage."
—Anna Akhmatova (1942)

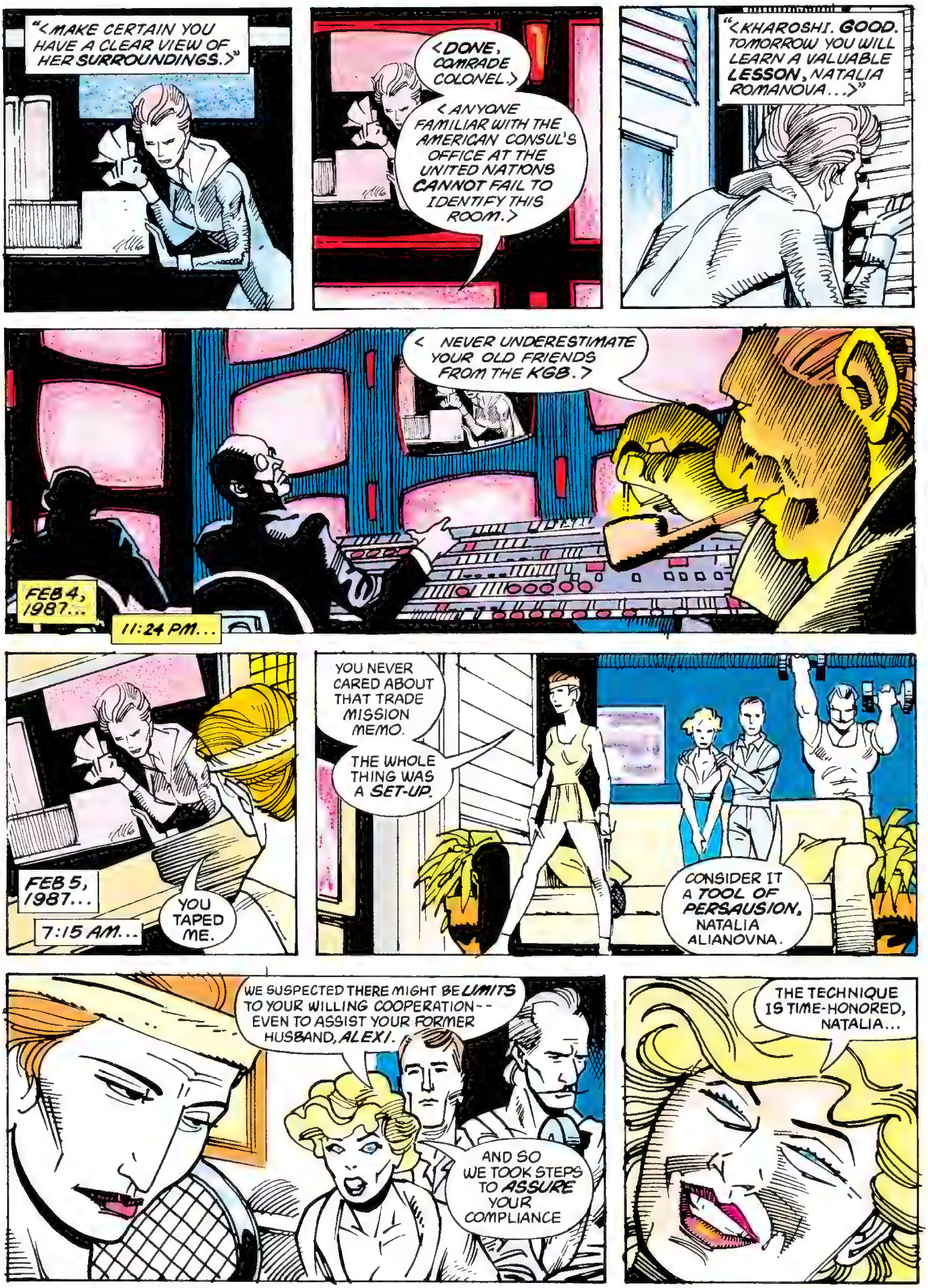

FEB. 4, 1987-- 10:23 AM...
...ESTABLISHED ON OCTOBER 24, 1945, THE UNITED NATIONS CURRENTLY NUMBERS ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-NINE COUNTRIES...
10:31 AM...
... SIX OFFICIAL WORKING LANGUAGES--CHINESE, ENGLISH, FRENCH, RUSSIAN, SPANISH, AND ARABIC...
10:42 AM...
...BUILT ON LAND PURCHASED WITH A DONATION OF $8,500,000 BY JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER...
10:56 AM...
...A STAFF OF SIX THOUSAND SPECIALISTS...
11:07 AM...
...39 STORIES TALL, THE SECRETARIAT BUILDING REMAINS THE HEART OF U.N. OPERATIONS WORLDWIDE...
11:07 PM...

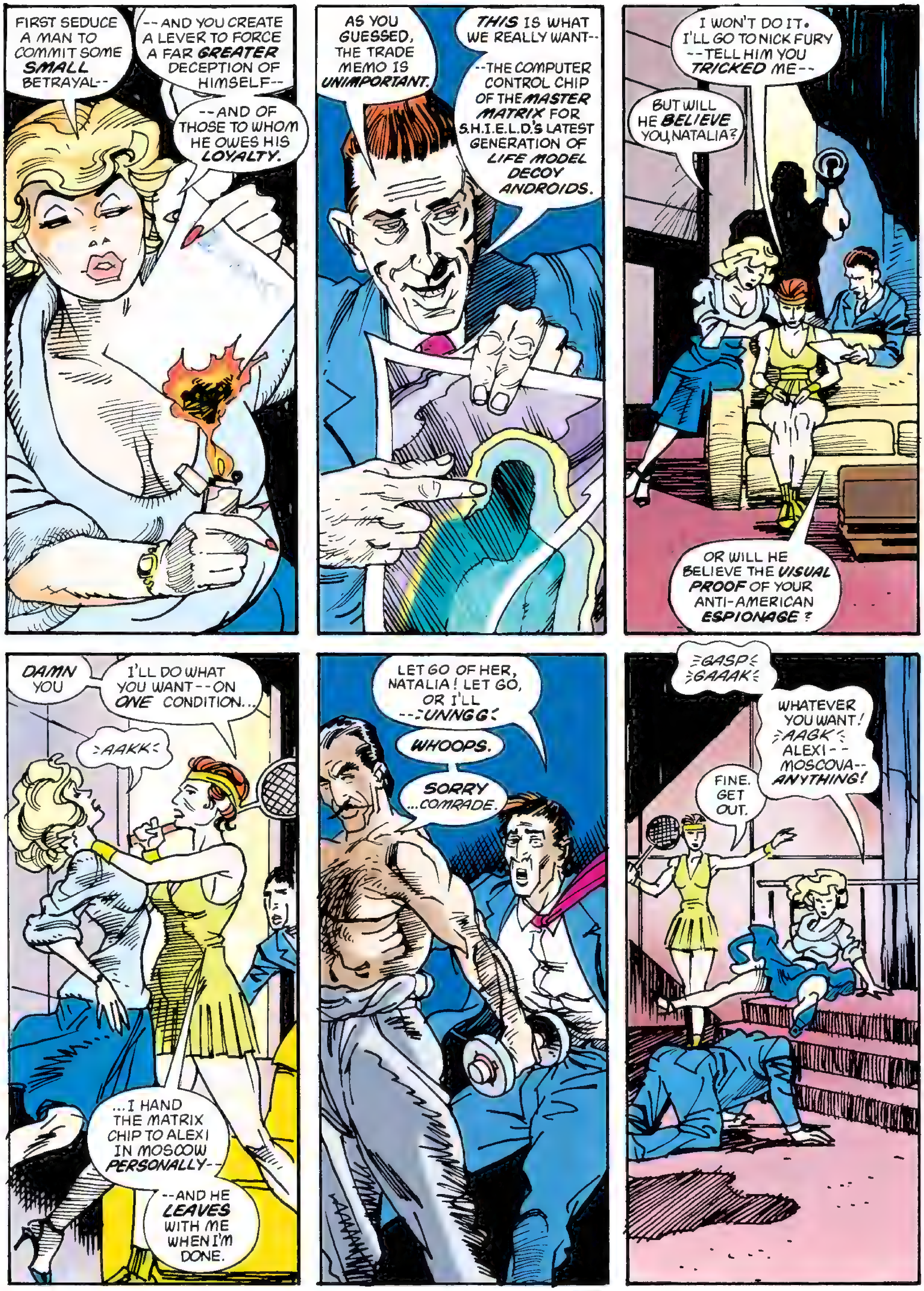

11:08 AM...
11:09 AM...
11:10 AM...
11:11 AM...
11:11 PM...
11:12 AM...
11:12 PM...
ZZPRAK

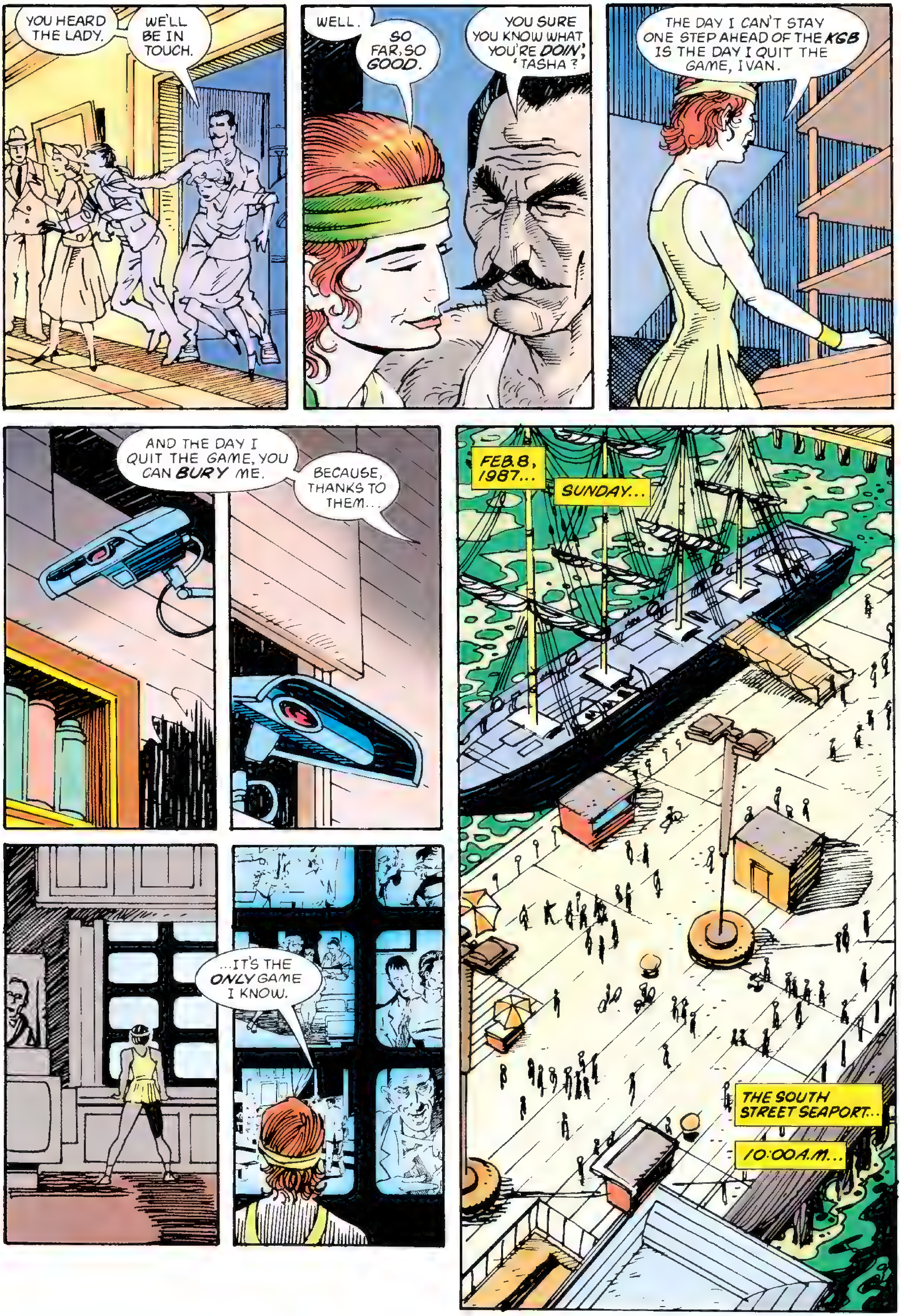

11:13 AM...
KLIK
FIRST VISIT?
NO--BUT EACH VISIT *FEELS* LIKE THE FIRST.
THERE'S SO MUCH HISTORY, I NEVER FEEL AS IF I'VE SEEN IT ALL.
THEN YOU MUST COME AGAIN.
OH, I WILL ... AND *SOON*.
11:13 PM...
-BZZK- POST TWO, CHECK SURVEILLANCE CAMERA EIGHT.
WE'RE NOT GETTING A SIGNAL.
RIGHT.
KLIK
11:14 PM...

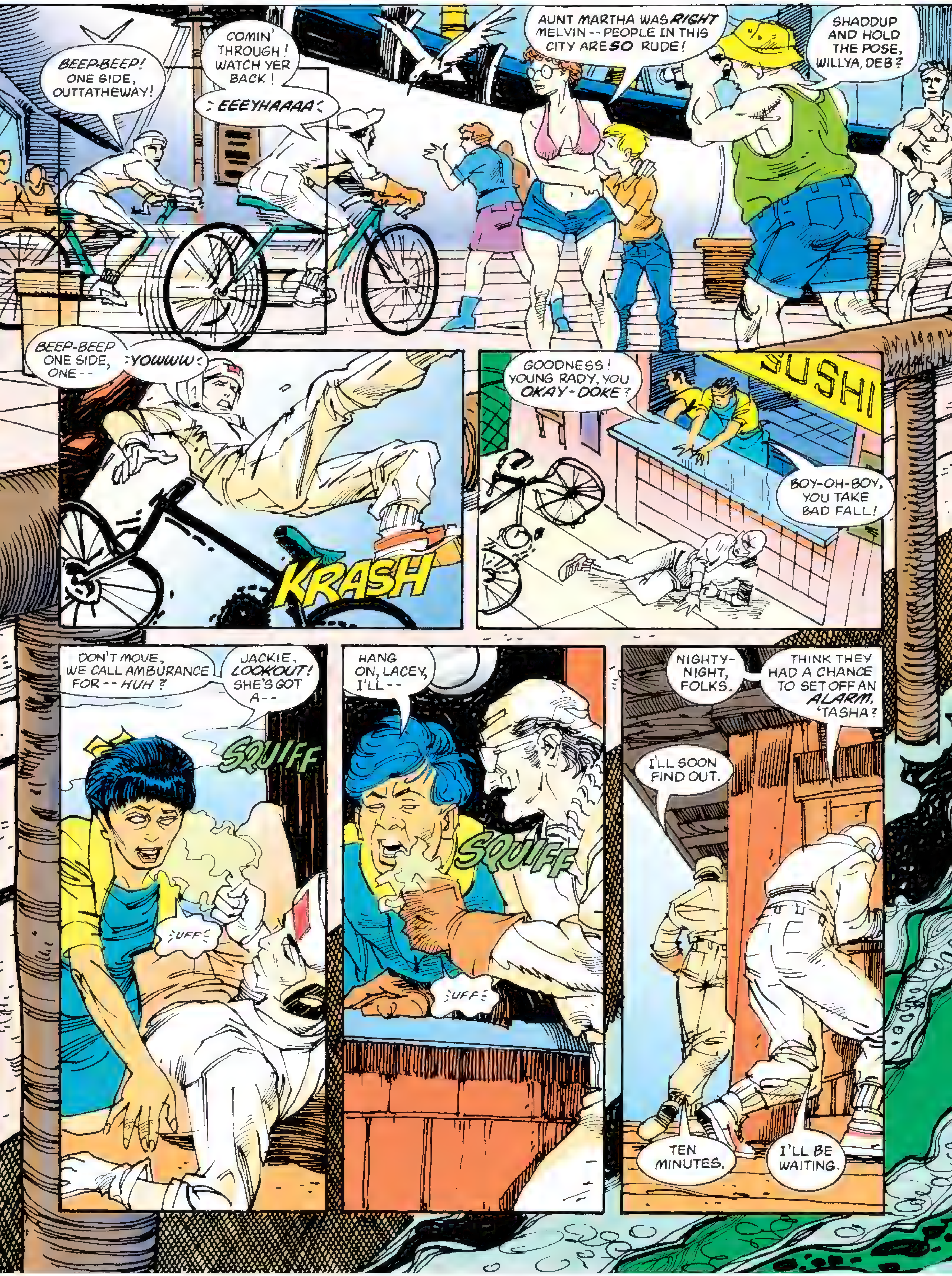

11:14 AM...
<THERE SHE GOES.>
<DO YOU THINK SHE'S COME UP WITH A PLAN TO GET PAST U.N. SECURITY?>
<IF SHE IS AS CLEVER AS YOU CLAIM, COMRADE, HOW CAN YOU DOUBT IT?>
11:15 AM...
11:15 PM...
18
15
14
11
10
--SIX: ONE TO HOLD THE LIGHT BULB WHILE THE OTHERS TURN THE LADDER.
HA HA VERY FUNNY.
BING
HEY!
LOBBY PATROL DIDN'T CHECK ANYONE THROUGH FOR THIS FLOOR, DID THEY?
DON'T THINK SO.
WELL, SOMEBODY'S COMING UP--HUH?
EMPTY?

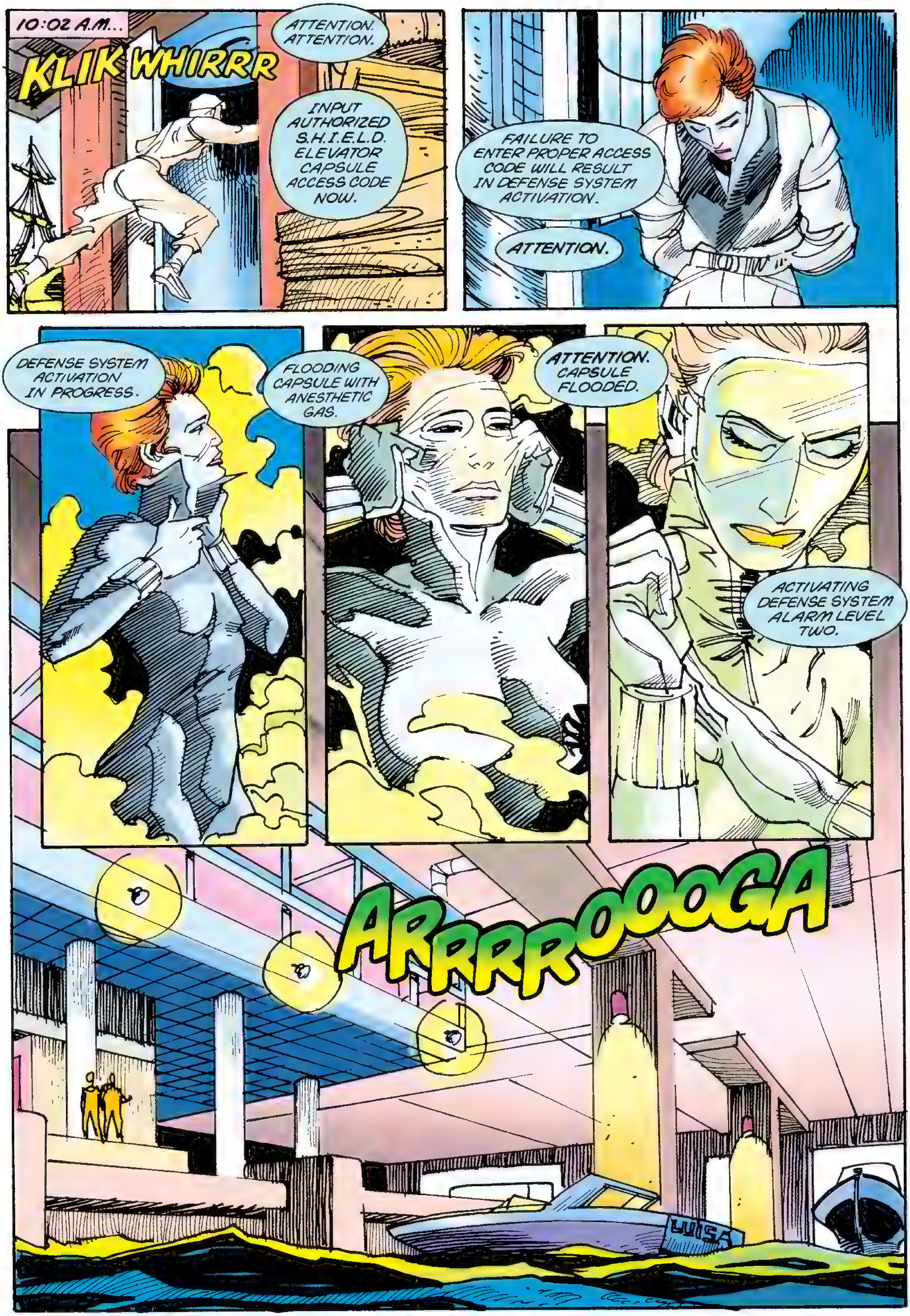

15
WHAT IS THIS, A GAG?
EITHER THAT, OR THE CONTROL PANEL SHORT-CIRCUITED.
LET'S RUN IT DOWN TO THE LOBBY, AND LEAVE A MESSAGE FOR *MAINTENANCE* TO CHECK IT TOMORROW.
OKAY.
LISTEN--
--DID YOU HEAR THE ONE ABOUT THE *TRAVELING SALESMAN*?
ONLY ABOUT TEN BILLION TIMES...
11:17 PM...
11:18 PM...
11:22 PM...
"<CAN WE MAKE THE FOCUS CLEARER, COMRADE?>"
11:19 PM...
"<AH, EXCELLENT...>"
MEMO

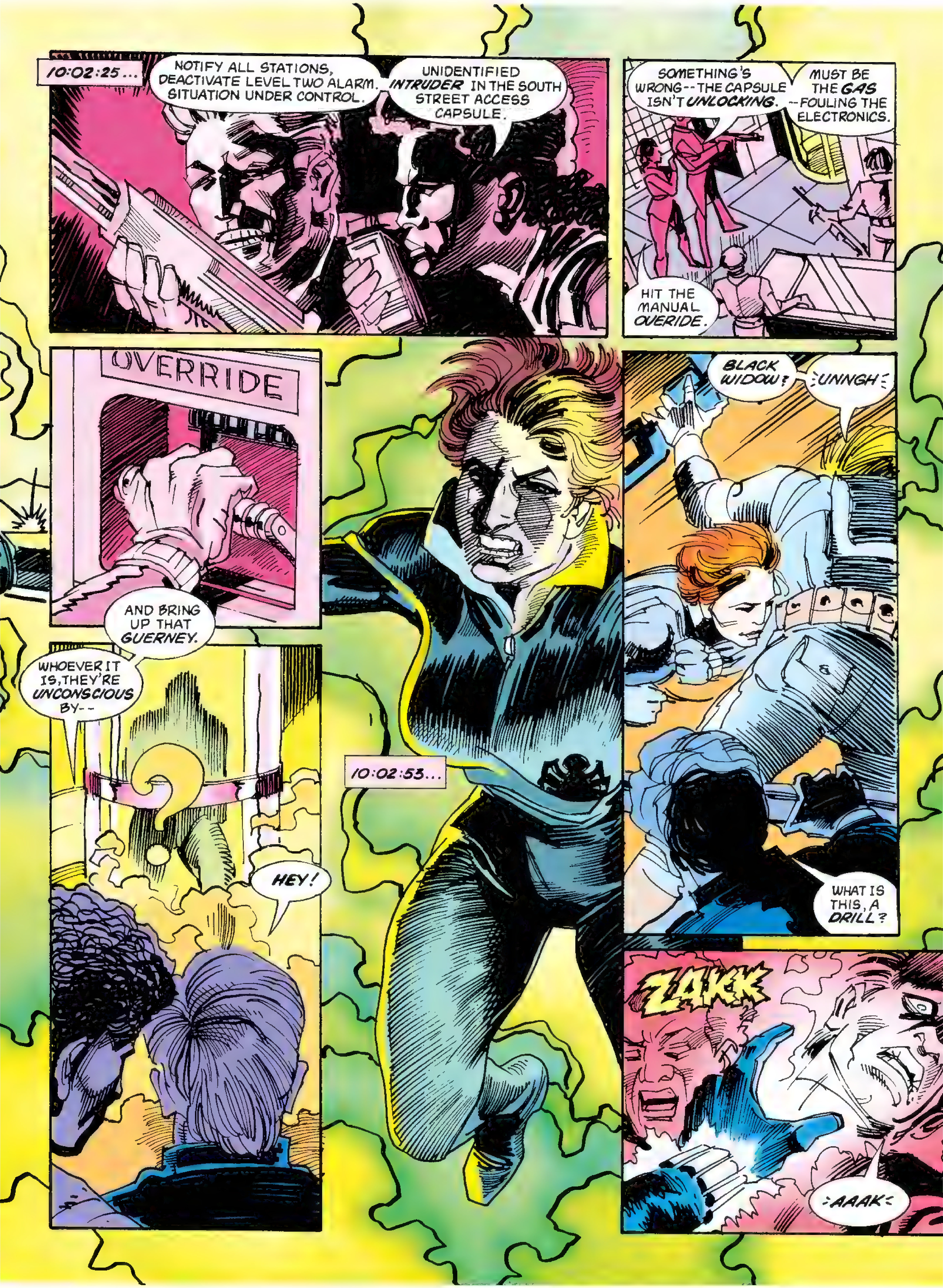

"<MAKE CERTAIN YOU HAVE A CLEAR VIEW OF HER SURROUNDINGS.>"
<DONE, COMRADE COLONEL.>
<ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH THE AMERICAN CONSUL'S OFFICE AT THE UNITED NATIONS CANNOT FAIL TO IDENTIFY THIS ROOM.>
"<KHAROSHI. GOOD. TOMORROW YOU WILL LEARN A VALUABLE LESSON, NATALIA ROMANOVA...>"
< NEVER UNDERESTIMATE YOUR OLD FRIENDS FROM THE KGB.>
FEB 4, 1987...
11:24 PM...
FEB 5, 1987...
7:15 AM...
YOU TAPED ME.
YOU NEVER CARED ABOUT THAT TRADE MISSION MEMO.
THE WHOLE THING WAS A SET-UP.
CONSIDER IT A TOOL OF PERSAUSION, NATALIA ALIANOVNA.
WE SUSPECTED THERE MIGHT BE LIMITS TO YOUR WILLING COOPERATION-- EVEN TO ASSIST YOUR FORMER HUSBAND, ALEXI.
AND SO WE TOOK STEPS TO ASSURE YOUR COMPLIANCE
THE TECHNIQUE IS TIME-HONORED, NATALIA...

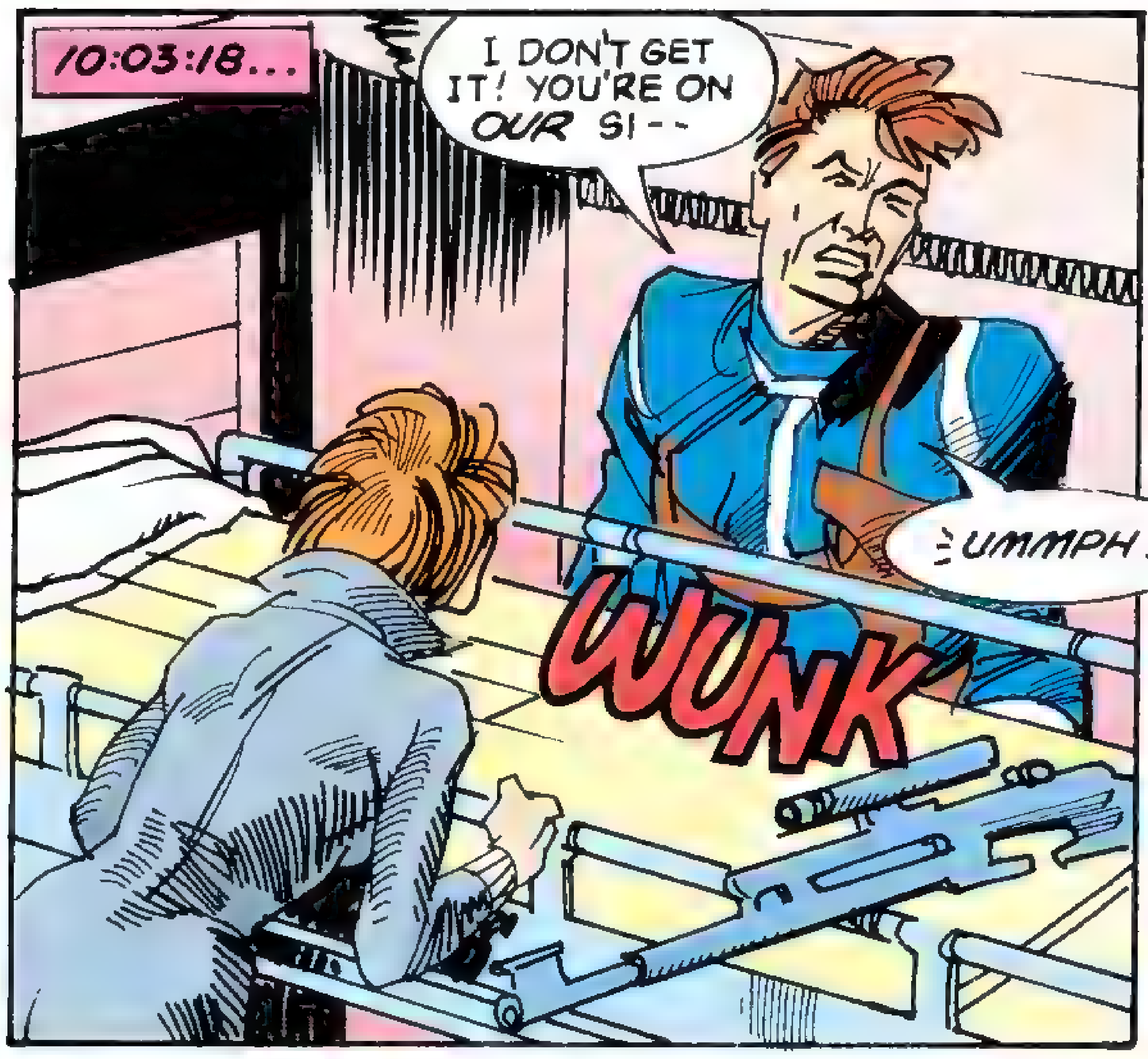

FIRST SEDUCE A MAN TO COMMIT SOME SMALL BETRAYAL--
--AND YOU CREATE A LEVER TO FORCE A FAR GREATER DECEPTION OF HIMSELF--
--AND OF THOSE TO WHOM HE OWES HIS LOYALTY.
AS YOU GUESSED, THE TRADE MEMO IS UNIMPORTANT.
THIS IS WHAT WE REALLY WANT--
--THE COMPUTER CONTROL CHIP OF THE MASTER MATRIX FOR S.H.I.E.L.D.'S LATEST GENERATION OF LIFE MODEL DECOY ANDROIDS.
I WON'T DO IT. I'LL GO TO NICK FURY --TELL HIM YOU TRICKED ME--
BUT WILL HE BELIEVE YOU, NATALIA?
OR WILL HE BELIEVE THE VISUAL PROOF OF YOUR ANTI-AMERICAN ESPIONAGE?
DAMN YOU
I'LL DO WHAT YOU WANT--ON ONE CONDITION...
AAKK
...I HAND THE MATRIX CHIP TO ALEXI IN MOSCOW PERSONALLY--
--AND HE LEAVES WITH ME WHEN I'M DONE.
LET GO OF HER, NATALIA! LET GO, OR I'LL --UNNGG
WHOOPS.
SORRY ...COMRADE.
GASP GAAAK
WHATEVER YOU WANT! AAGK ALEXI-- MOSCOVA-- ANYTHING!
FINE. GET OUT.

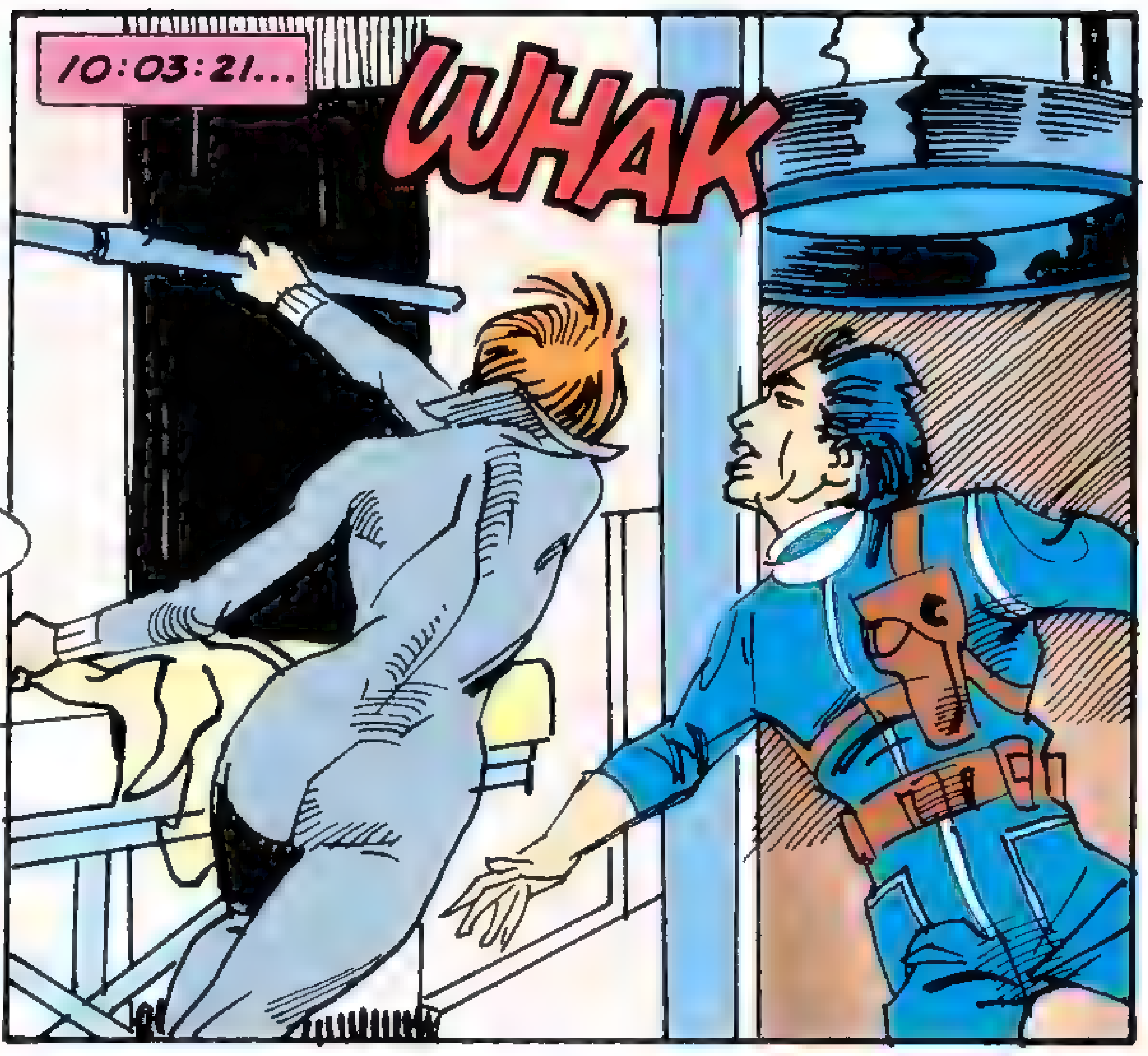

YOU HEARD THE LADY.
WE'LL BE IN TOUCH.
WELL.
SO FAR, SO GOOD.
YOU SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOIN', 'TASHA?
THE DAY I CAN'T STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE KGB IS THE DAY I QUIT THE GAME, IVAN.
AND THE DAY I QUIT THE GAME, YOU CAN BURY ME.
BECAUSE, THANKS TO THEM...
...IT'S THE ONLY GAME I KNOW.
FEB. 8, 1987...
SUNDAY...
THE SOUTH STREET SEAPORT...
10:00 A.M...

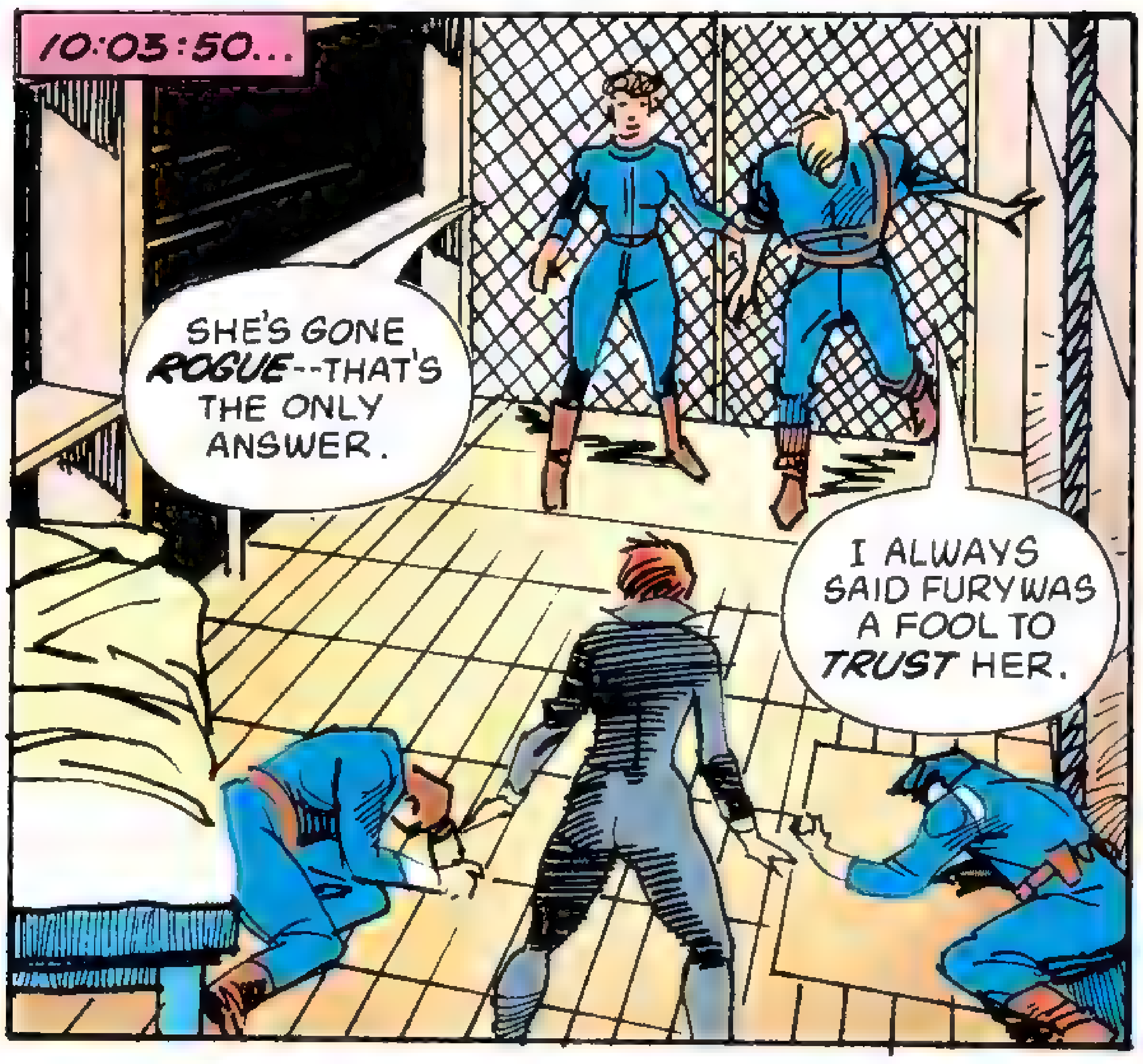

BEEP-BEEP! ONE SIDE, OUTTATHEWAY!
COMIN' THROUGH! WATCH YER BACK!
EEEYHAAAA!
AUNT MARTHA WAS RIGHT MELVIN -- PEOPLE IN THIS CITY ARE SO RUDE!
SHADDUP AND HOLD THE POSE, WILLYA, DEB?
BEEP-BEEP ONE SIDE, ONE --
YOWWW!
KRASH
GOODNESS! YOUNG RADY, YOU OKAY-DOKE?
SUSHI
BOY-OH-BOY, YOU TAKE BAD FALL!
DON'T MOVE, WE CALL AMBURANCE FOR -- HUH?
JACKIE, LOOKOUT! SHE'S GOT A --
SQUIFF
UFF
HANG ON, LACEY, I'LL --
SQUIFF
UFF
NIGHTY-NIGHT, FOLKS.
THINK THEY HAD A CHANCE TO SET OFF AN ALARM, 'TASHA?
I'LL SOON FIND OUT.
TEN MINUTES.
I'LL BE WAITING.

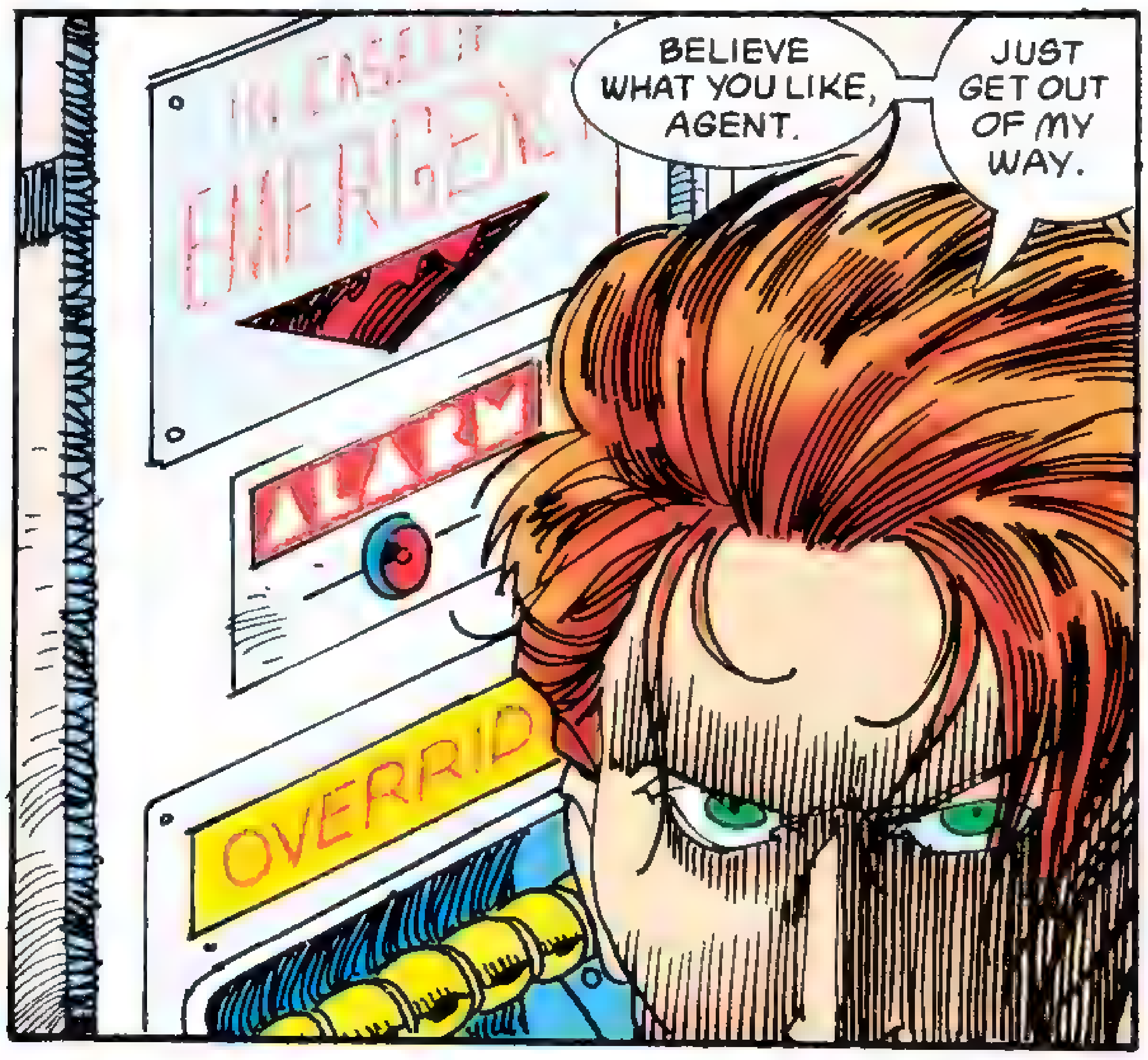

10:02 A.M...
KLIK WHIRRR
ATTENTION. ATTENTION.
INPUT AUTHORIZED S.H.I.E.L.D. ELEVATOR CAPSULE ACCESS CODE NOW.
FAILURE TO ENTER PROPER ACCESS CODE WILL RESULT IN DEFENSE SYSTEM ACTIVATION.
ATTENTION.
DEFENSE SYSTEM ACTIVATION IN PROGRESS.
FLOODING CAPSULE WITH ANESTHETIC GAS.
ATTENTION. CAPSULE FLOODED.
ACTIVATING DEFENSE SYSTEM ALARM LEVEL TWO.
ARRRROOOGA
LUISA

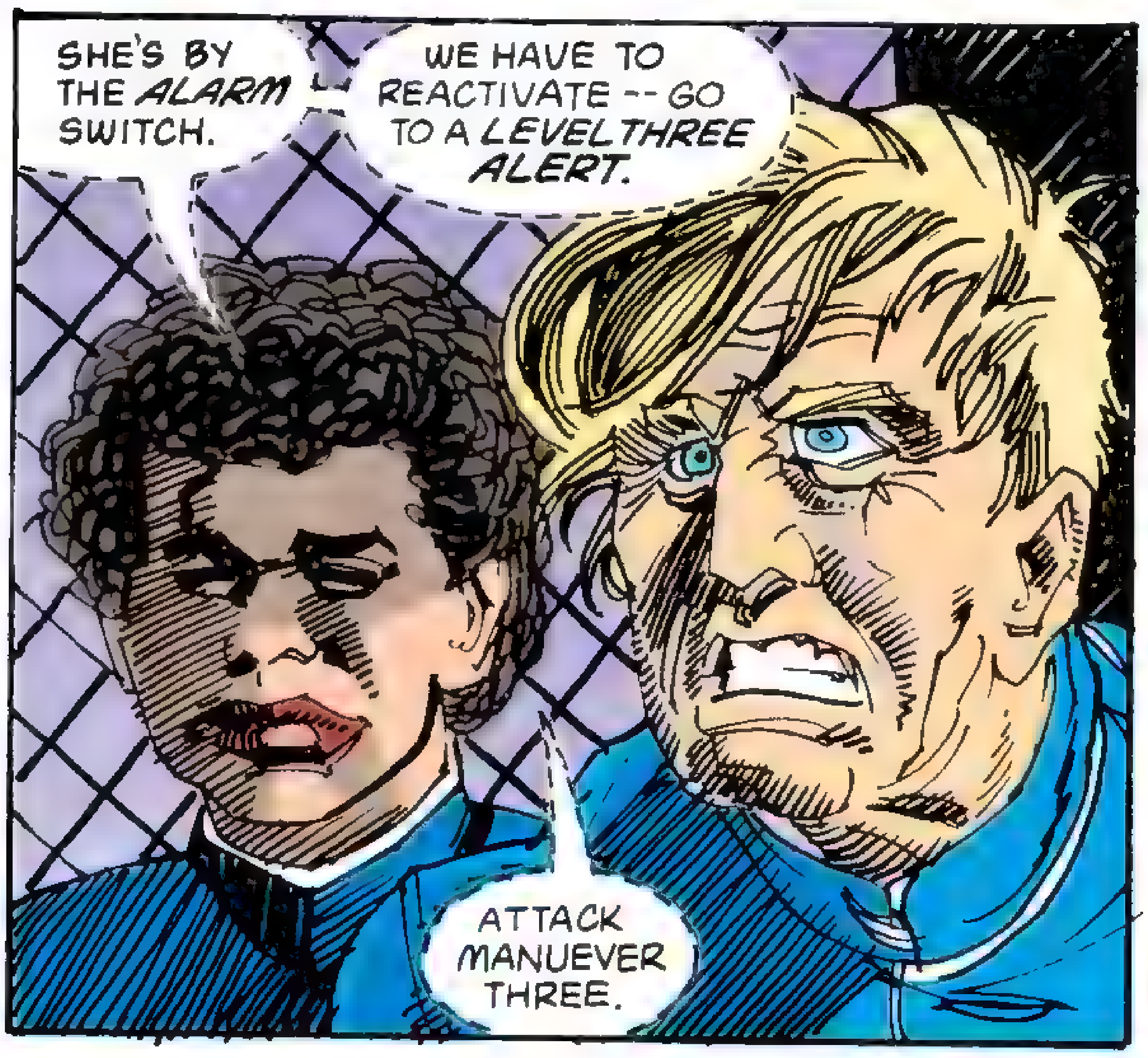

10:02:25...
NOTIFY ALL STATIONS, DEACTIVATE LEVEL TWO ALARM. SITUATION UNDER CONTROL.
UNIDENTIFIED INTRUDER IN THE SOUTH STREET ACCESS CAPSULE.
SOMETHING'S WRONG--THE CAPSULE ISN'T UNLOCKING.
MUST BE THE GAS --FOULING THE ELECTRONICS.
HIT THE MANUAL OVERIDE.
OVERRIDE
AND BRING UP THAT GUERNEY.
WHOEVER IT IS, THEY'RE UNCONSCIOUS BY--
HEY!
10:02:53...
BLACK WIDOW?
UNNGH
WHAT IS THIS, A DRILL?
ZAKK
AAAK

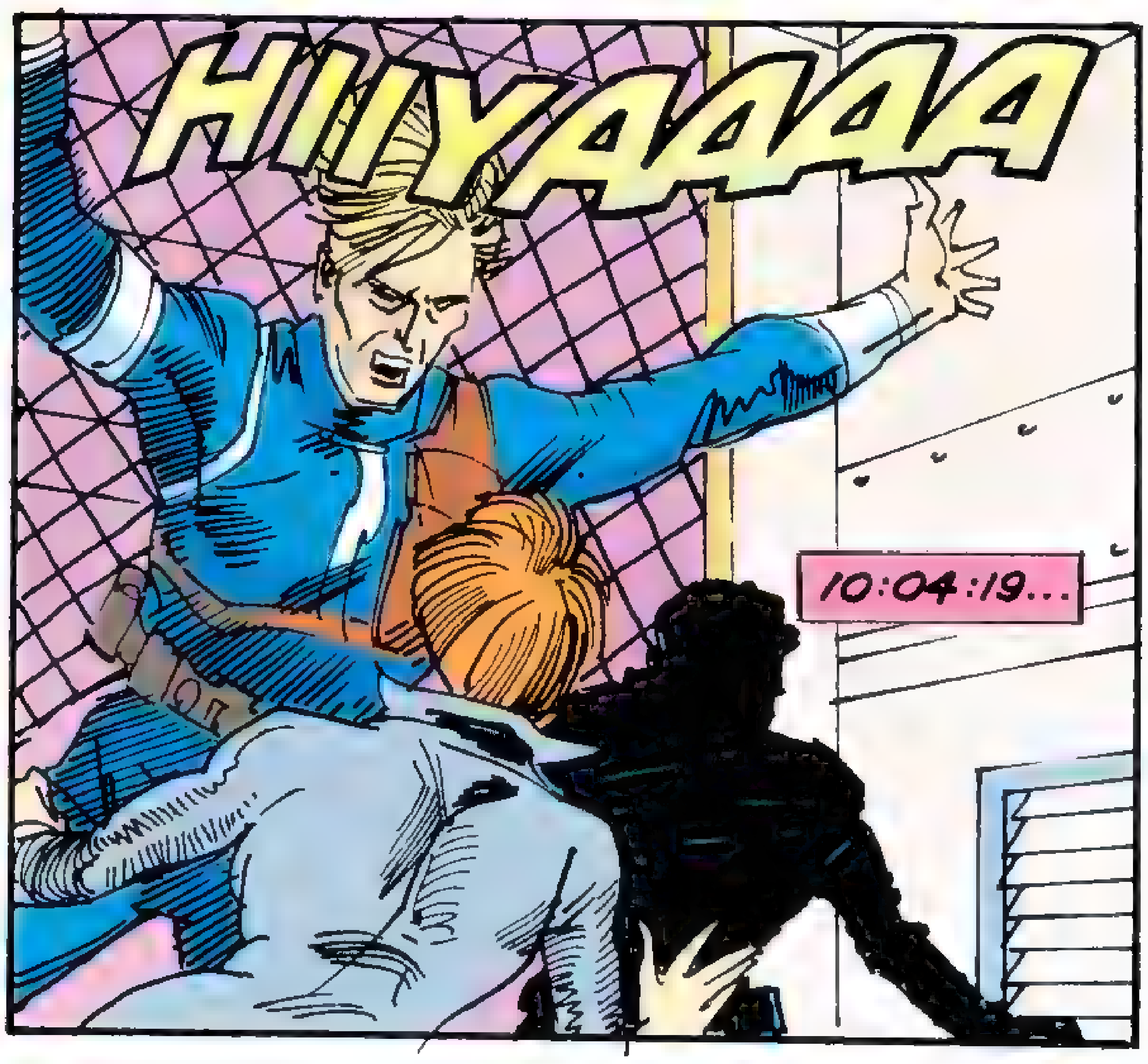

10:03:18...
I DON'T GET IT! YOU'RE ON *OUR* SI--
WUNK
UMMPH

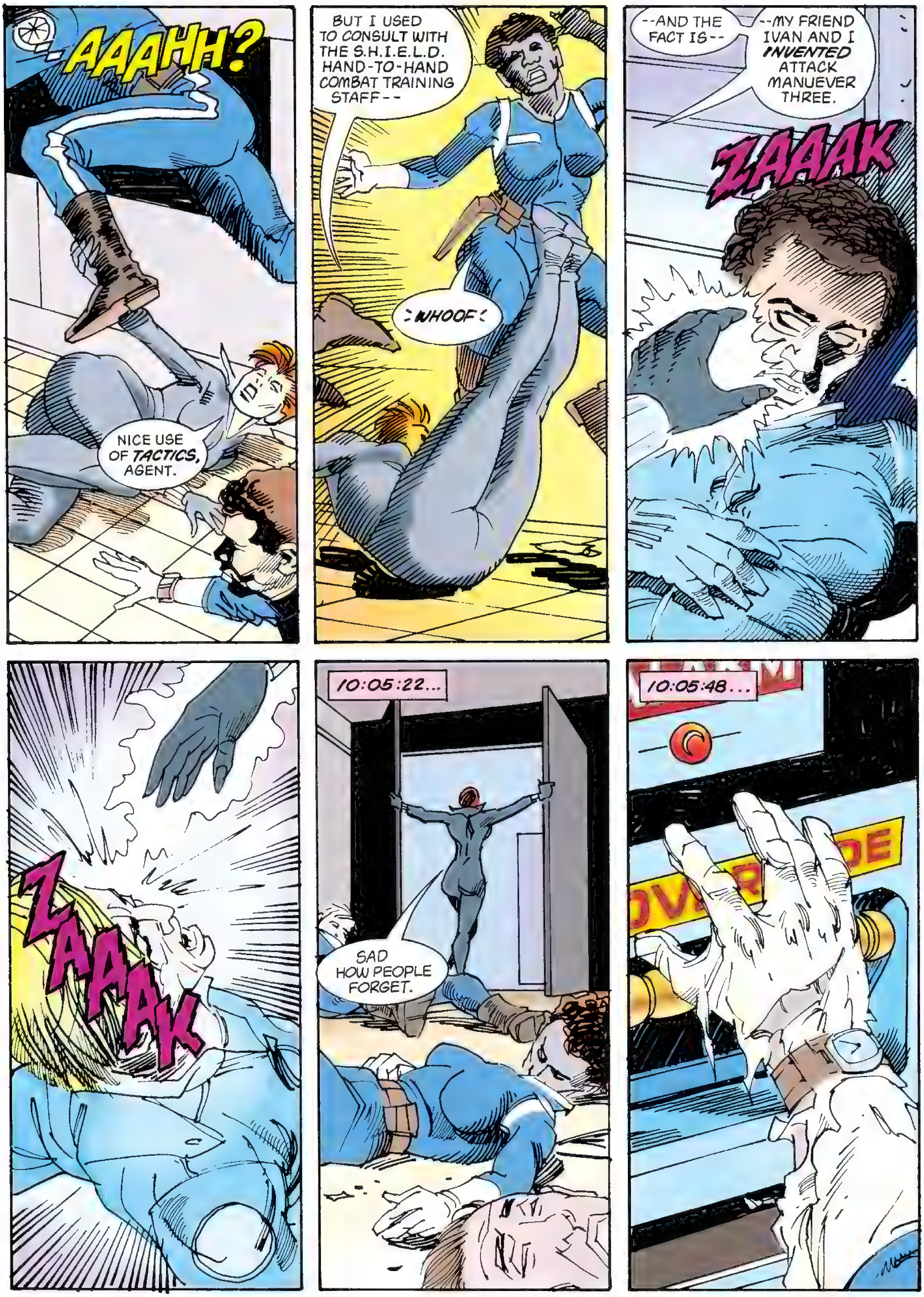

10:03:21...
WHAK

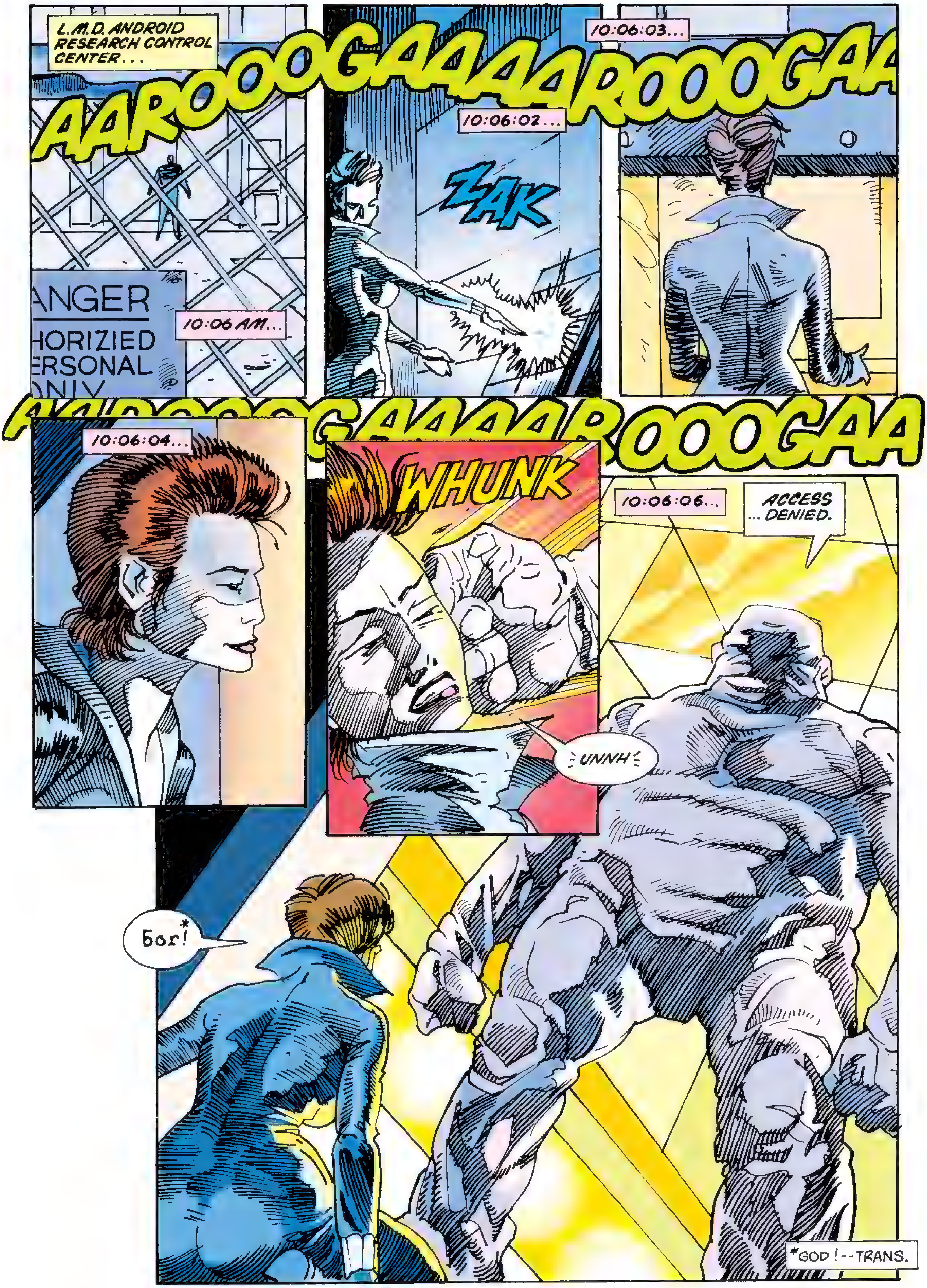

10:03:50...
SHE'S GONE *ROGUE*--THAT'S THE ONLY ANSWER.
I ALWAYS SAID FURY WAS A FOOL TO *TRUST* HER.

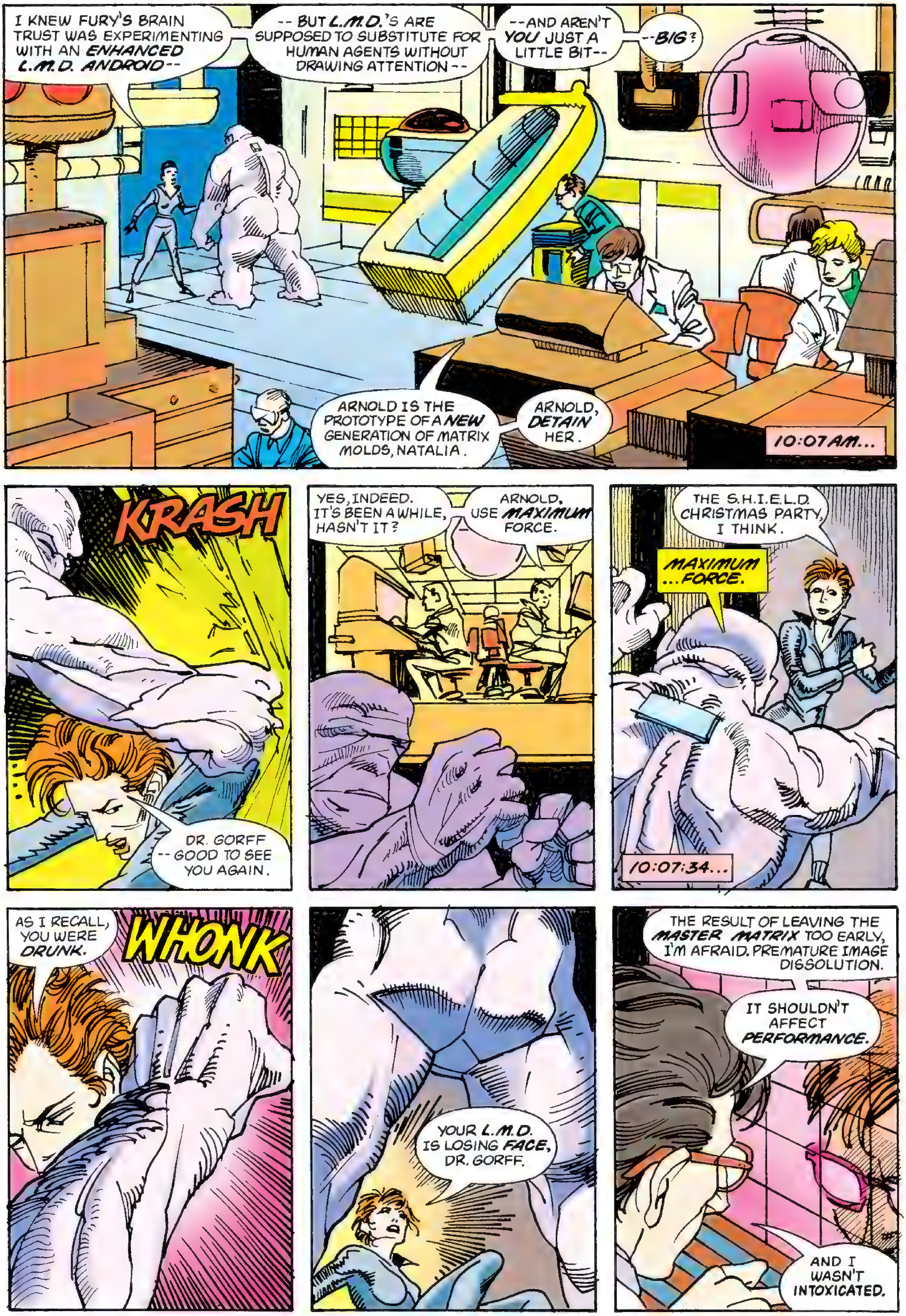

BELIEVE WHAT YOU LIKE, AGENT.
JUST GET OUT OF *MY* WAY.
ALARM
OVERRID

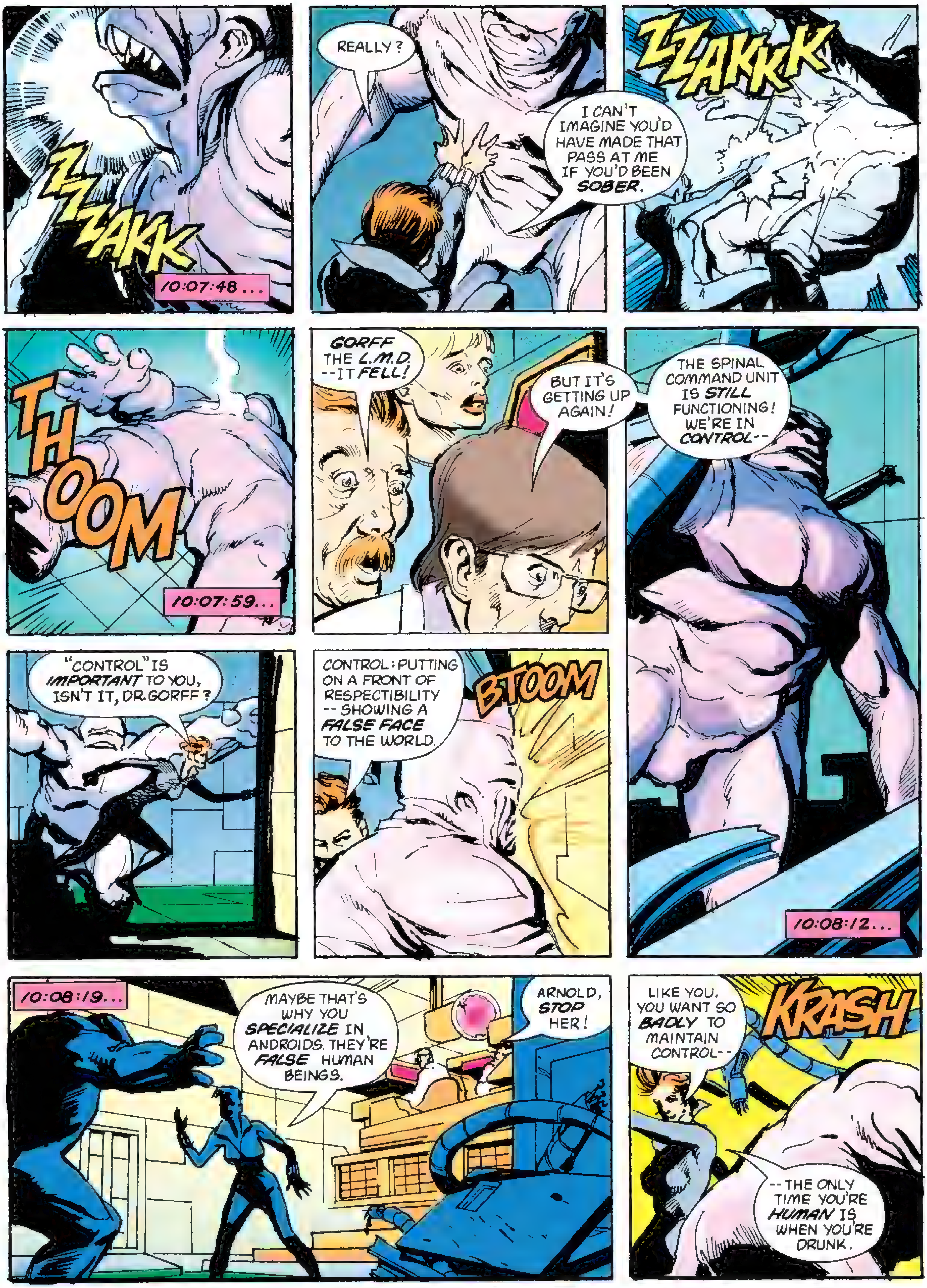

SHE'S BY THE *ALARM* SWITCH.
WE HAVE TO REACTIVATE -- GO TO A *LEVEL THREE ALERT.*
ATTACK MANUEVER THREE.

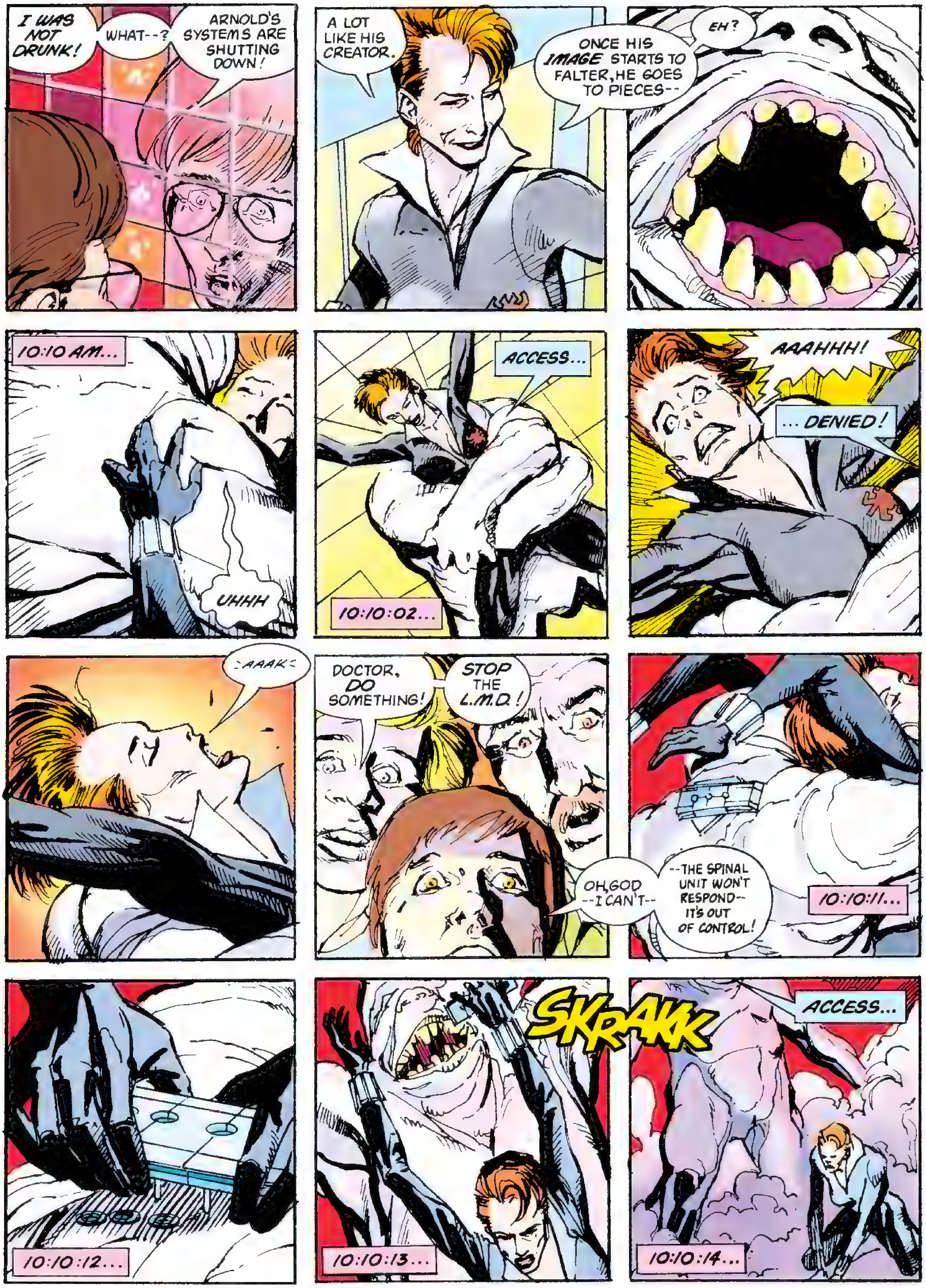

HIIYAAAA
10:04:19...

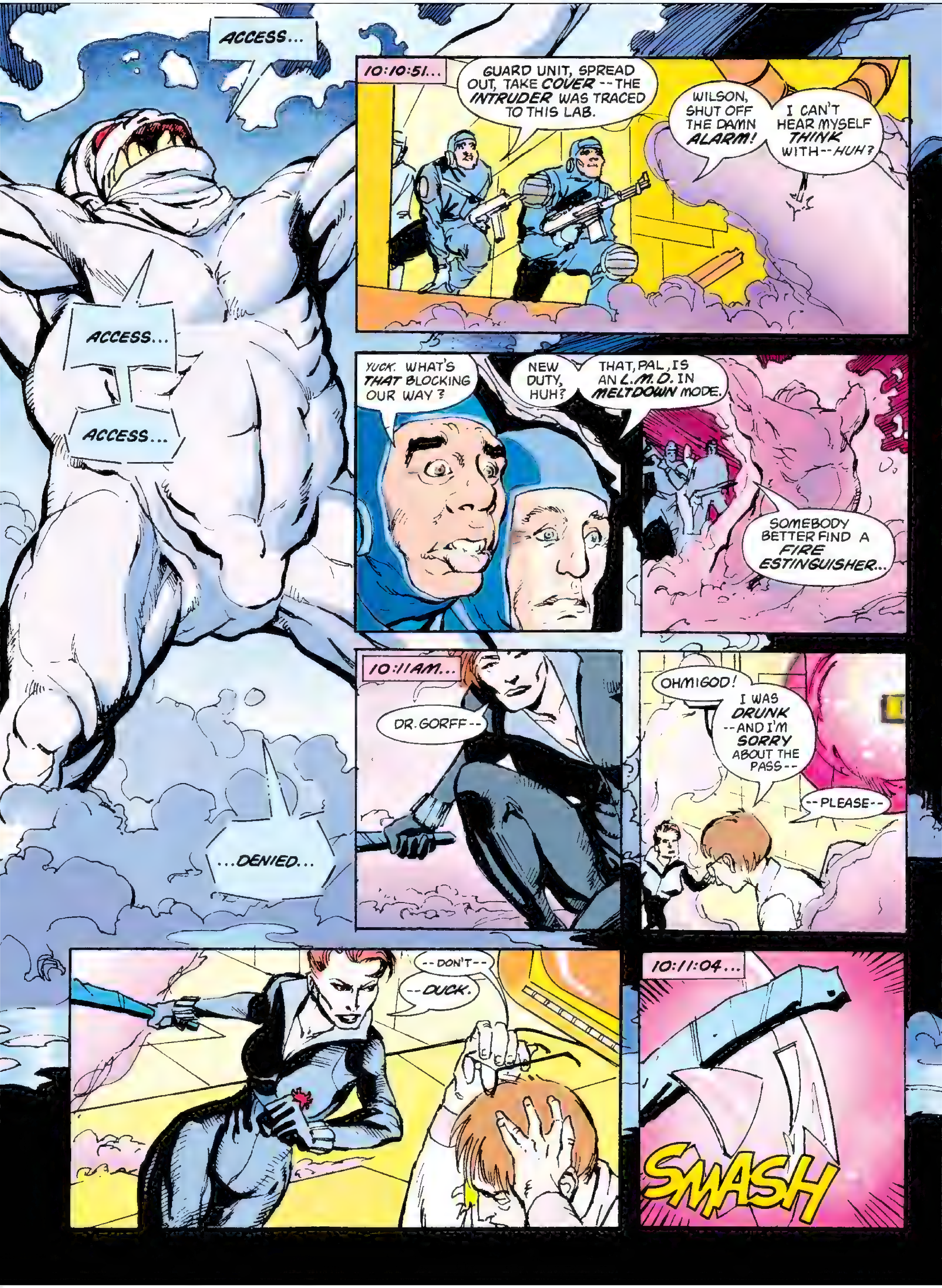

AAAHH?
NICE USE OF *TACTICS,* AGENT.
BUT I USED TO CONSULT WITH THE S.H.I.E.L.D. HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT TRAINING STAFF--
WHOOF
--AND THE FACT IS--
--MY FRIEND IVAN AND I *INVENTED* ATTACK MANUEVER THREE.
ZAAAK
ZAAAK
10:05:22...
SAD HOW PEOPLE FORGET.
10:05:48...

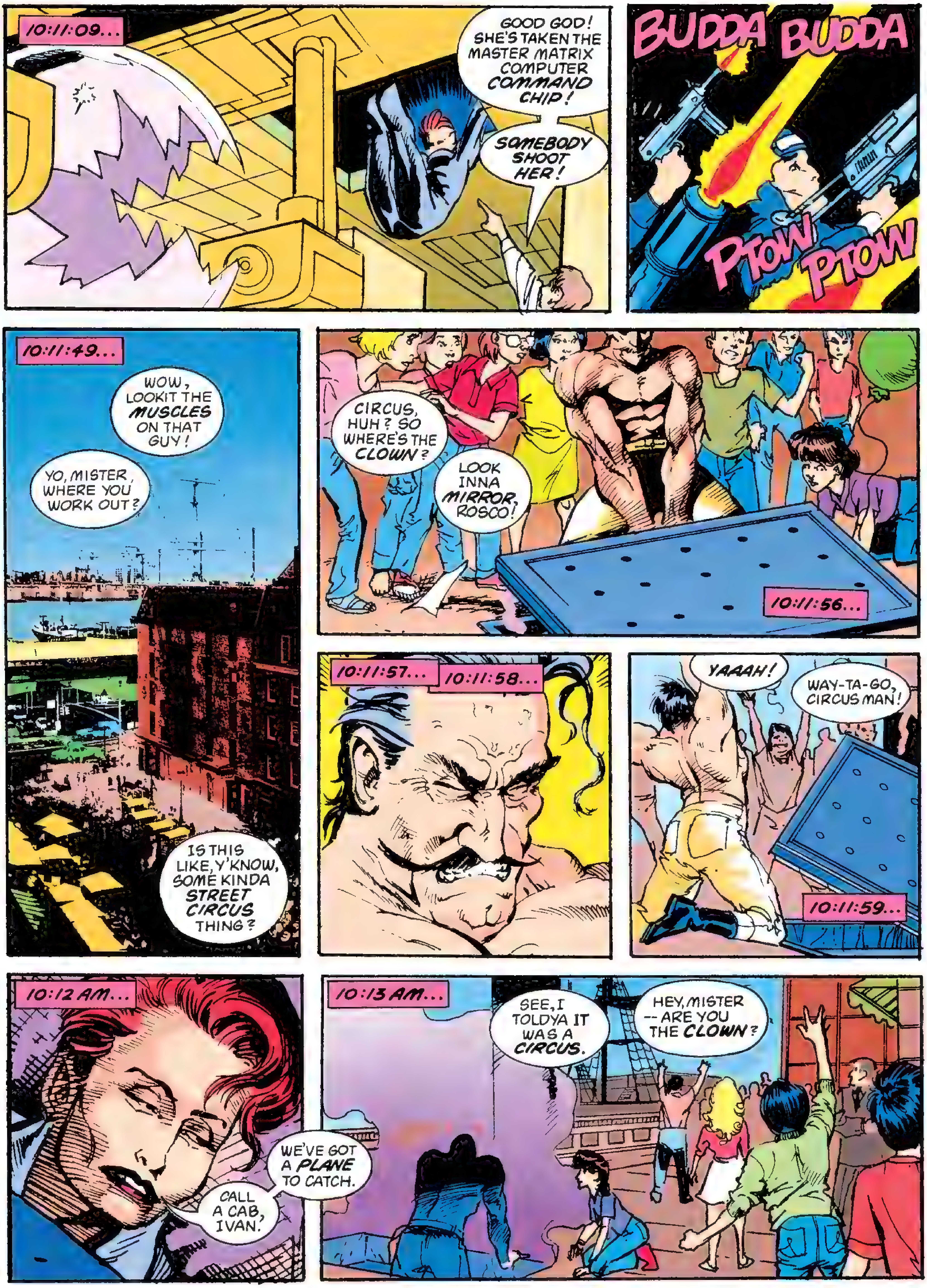

L.M.D. ANDROID RESEARCH CONTROL CENTER...
AAROOOGAAAAAROOOOGAA
ANGER
HORIZIED
ERSONAL
ONLY
10:06 AM...
10:06:02...
ZAK
10:06:03...
AAROOOGAAAAROOOOGAA
10:06:04...
WHUNK
UNNH
10:06:06...
ACCESS ...DENIED.
Бог!*
*GOD!--TRANS.


I KNEW FURY'S BRAIN TRUST WAS EXPERIMENTING WITH AN ENHANCED L.M.D. ANDROID--
-- BUT L.M.D.'S ARE SUPPOSED TO SUBSTITUTE FOR HUMAN AGENTS WITHOUT DRAWING ATTENTION --
--AND AREN'T YOU JUST A LITTLE BIT--
--BIG?
ARNOLD IS THE PROTOTYPE OF A NEW GENERATION OF MATRIX MOLDS, NATALIA.
ARNOLD, DETAIN HER.
10:07 AM...
KRASH
DR. GORFF -- GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
YES, INDEED. IT'S BEEN A WHILE, HASN'T IT?
ARNOLD, USE MAXIMUM FORCE.
THE S.H.I.E.L.D. CHRISTMAS PARTY, I THINK.
MAXIMUM ...FORCE.
10:07:34...
AS I RECALL, YOU WERE DRUNK.
WHONK
YOUR L.M.D. IS LOSING FACE, DR. GORFF.
THE RESULT OF LEAVING THE MASTER MATRIX TOO EARLY, I'M AFRAID. PREMATURE IMAGE DISSOLUTION.
IT SHOULDN'T AFFECT PERFORMANCE.
AND I WASN'T INTOXICATED.


ZZZAKK
10:07:48...
REALLY?
I CAN'T IMAGINE YOU'D HAVE MADE THAT PASS AT ME IF YOU'D BEEN *SOBER*.
ZZAKKK
THOOM
10:07:59...
GORFF THE *L.M.D.* --IT *FELL!*
BUT IT'S GETTING UP AGAIN!
THE SPINAL COMMAND UNIT IS *STILL* FUNCTIONING! WE'RE IN *CONTROL*--
10:08:12...
"CONTROL" IS *IMPORTANT* TO YOU, ISN'T IT, DR. GORFF?
CONTROL: PUTTING ON A FRONT OF RESPECTIBILITY -- SHOWING A *FALSE FACE* TO THE WORLD.
BTOOM
10:08:19...
MAYBE THAT'S WHY YOU *SPECIALIZE* IN ANDROIDS. THEY'RE *FALSE* HUMAN BEINGS.
ARNOLD, *STOP* HER!
LIKE YOU. YOU WANT SO *BADLY* TO MAINTAIN CONTROL--
KRASH
--THE ONLY TIME YOU'RE *HUMAN* IS WHEN YOU'RE DRUNK.


I WAS NOT DRUNK!
WHAT--?
ARNOLD'S SYSTEMS ARE SHUTTING DOWN!
A LOT LIKE HIS CREATOR.
ONCE HIS IMAGE STARTS TO FALTER, HE GOES TO PIECES--
EH?
10:10 AM...
UHHH
ACCESS...
10:10:02...
AAAHHH!
... DENIED!
:AAAK:
DOCTOR, DO SOMETHING!
STOP THE L.M.D.!
OH, GOD --I CAN'T--
--THE SPINAL UNIT WON'T RESPOND-- IT'S OUT OF CONTROL!
10:10:11...
10:10:12...
SKRAKK
10:10:13...
ACCESS...
10:10:14...


ACCESS...
10:10:51...
GUARD UNIT, SPREAD OUT, TAKE COVER -- THE INTRUDER WAS TRACED TO THIS LAB.
WILSON, SHUT OFF THE DAMN ALARM!
I CAN'T HEAR MYSELF THINK WITH -- HUH?
ACCESS...
YUCK. WHAT'S THAT BLOCKING OUR WAY?
NEW DUTY, HUH?
THAT, PAL, IS AN L.M.D. IN MELTDOWN MODE.
SOMEBODY BETTER FIND A FIRE ESTINGUISHER...
ACCESS...
10:11AM...
DR. GORFF --
OHMIGOD!
I WAS DRUNK -- AND I'M SORRY ABOUT THE PASS --
-- PLEASE --
...DENIED...
-- DON'T --
-- DUCK.
10:11:04...
SMASH

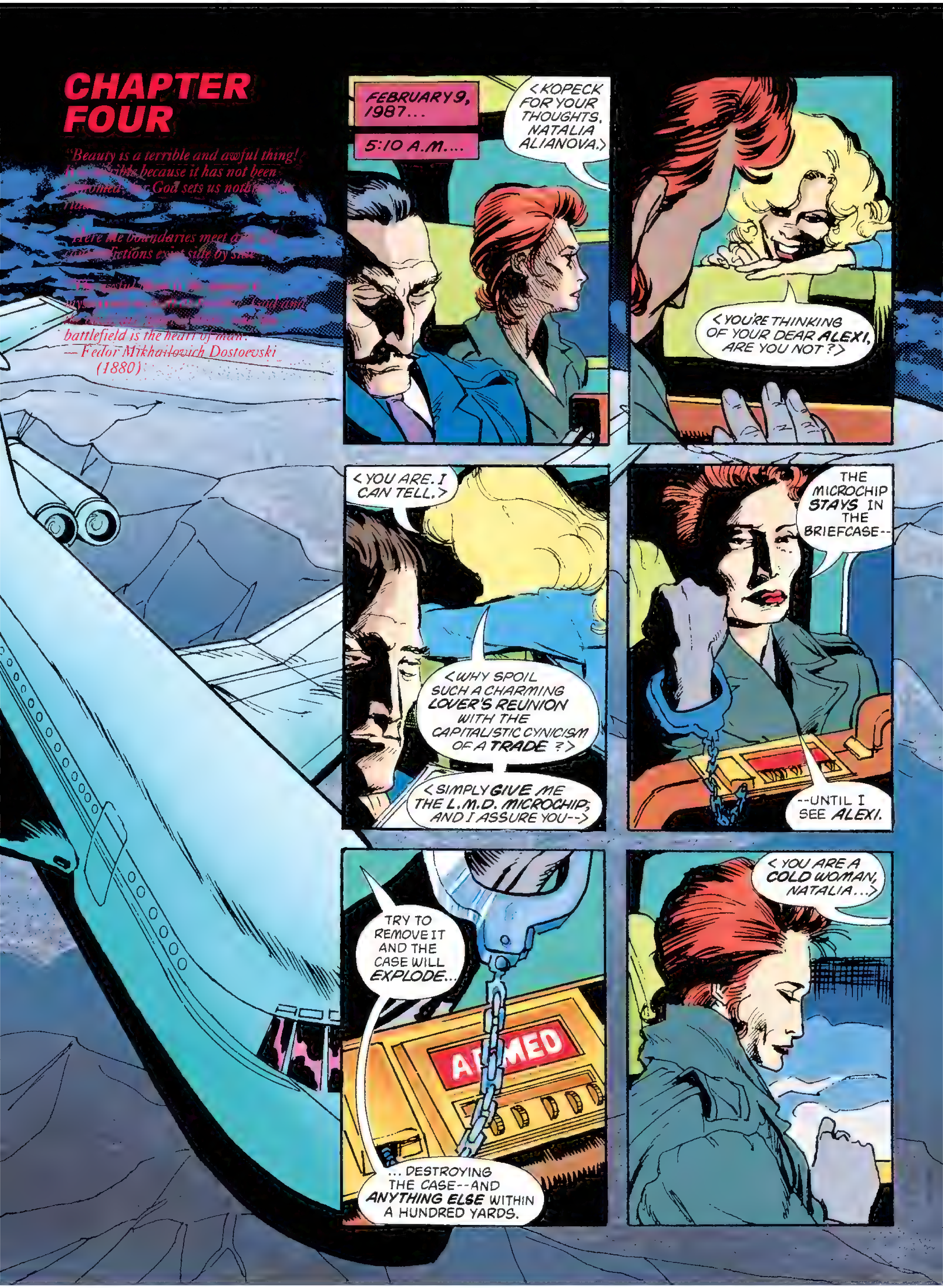

10:11:09...
GOOD GOD! SHE'S TAKEN THE MASTER MATRIX COMPUTER COMMAND CHIP!
SOMEBODY SHOOT HER!
BUDDA BUDDA
PTOW PTOW
10:11:49...
WOW, LOOKIT THE MUSCLES ON THAT GUY!
YO, MISTER, WHERE YOU WORK OUT?
IS THIS LIKE, Y'KNOW, SOME KINDA STREET CIRCUS THING?
CIRCUS, HUH? SO WHERE'S THE CLOWN?
LOOK INNA MIRROR, ROSCO!
10:11:56...
10:11:57...
10:11:58...
YAAAH!
WAY-TA-GO, CIRCUS MAN!
10:11:59...
10:12 AM...
WE'VE GOT A PLANE TO CATCH.
CALL A CAB, IVAN.
10:13 AM...
SEE, I TOLDYA IT WAS A CIRCUS.
HEY, MISTER -- ARE YOU THE CLOWN?

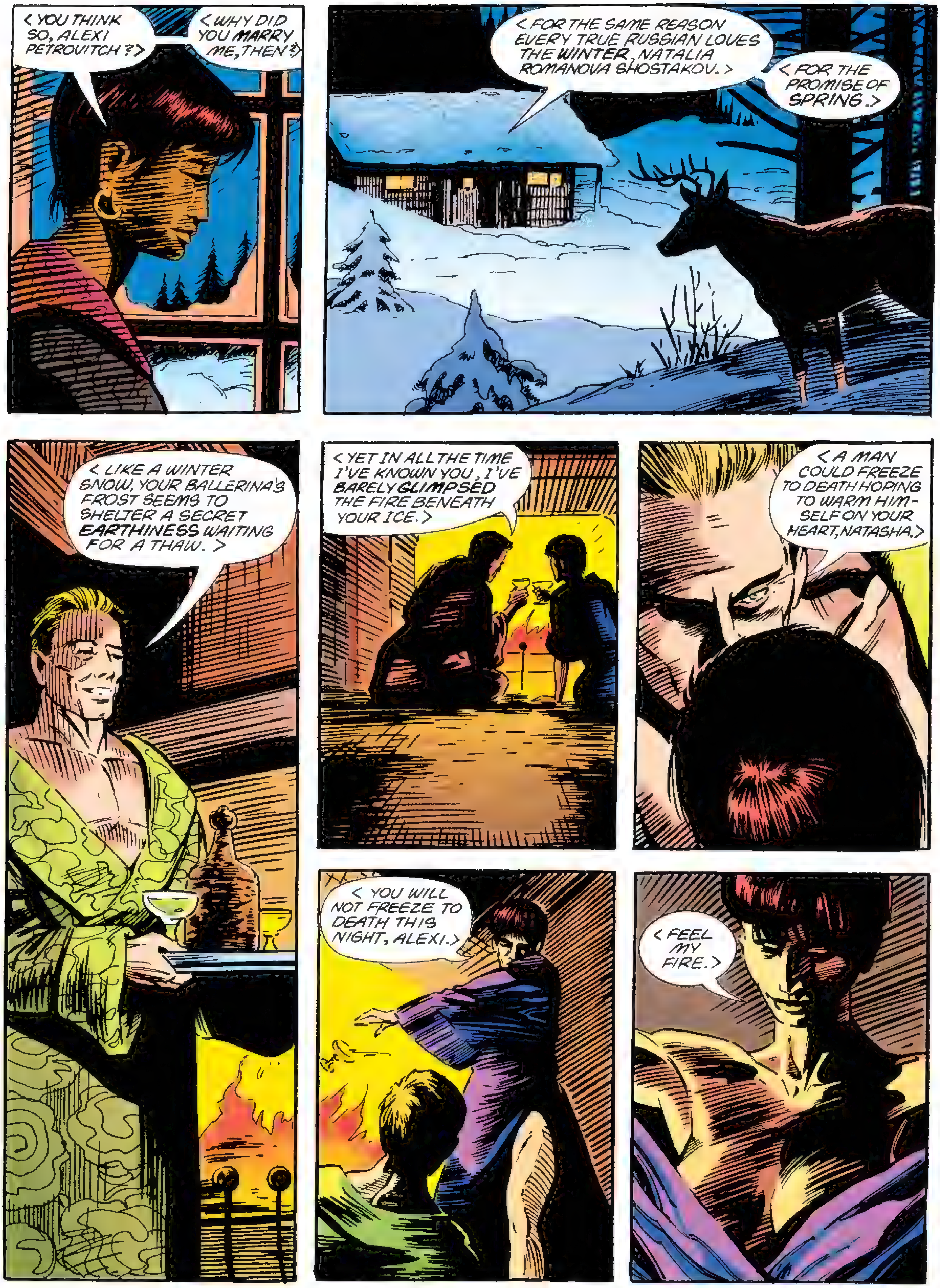
CHAPTER FOUR

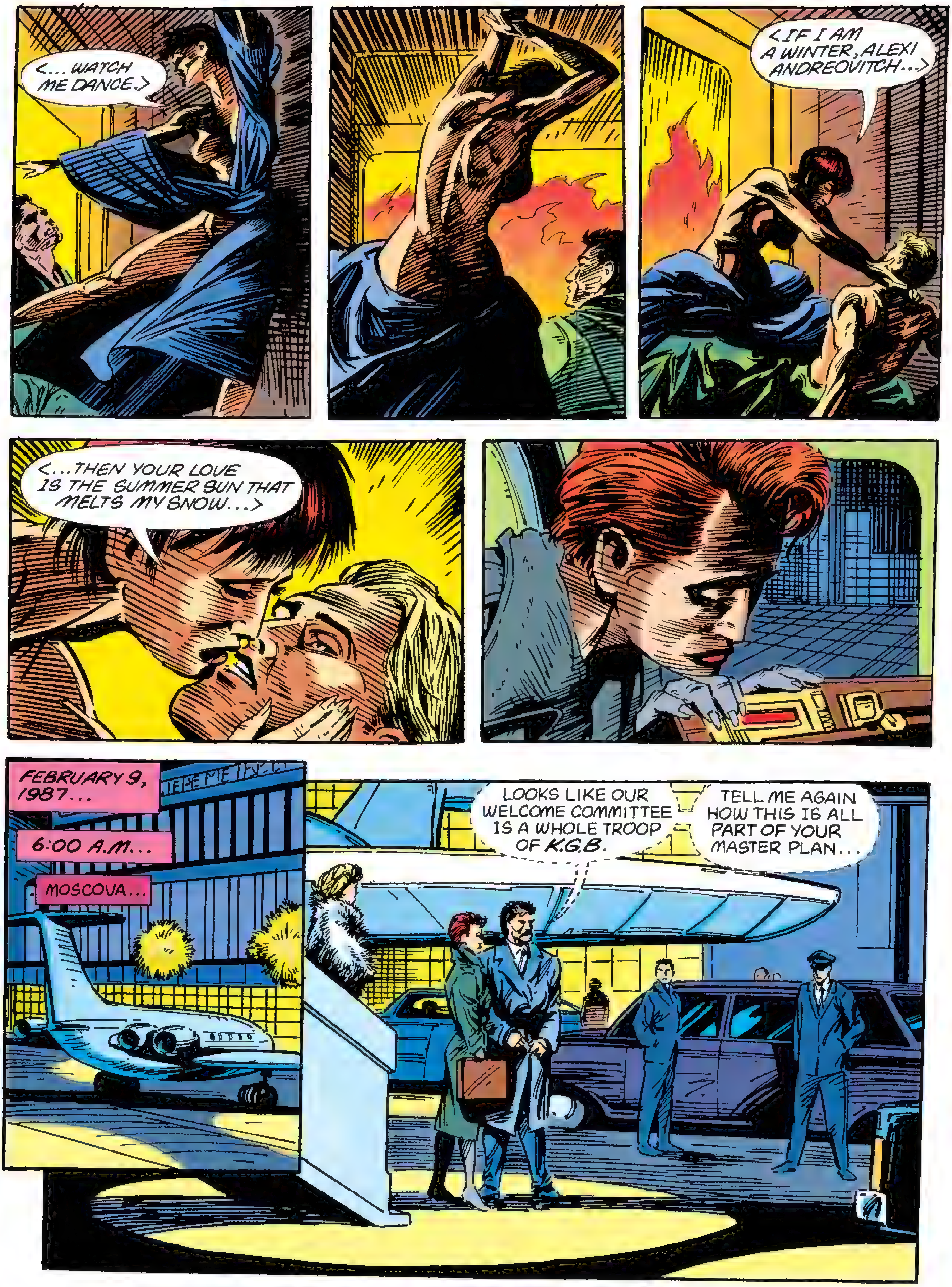
"Beauty is a terrible and awful thing! I[illegible]ible because it has not been [illegible]omed [illegible] God sets us noth[illegible]

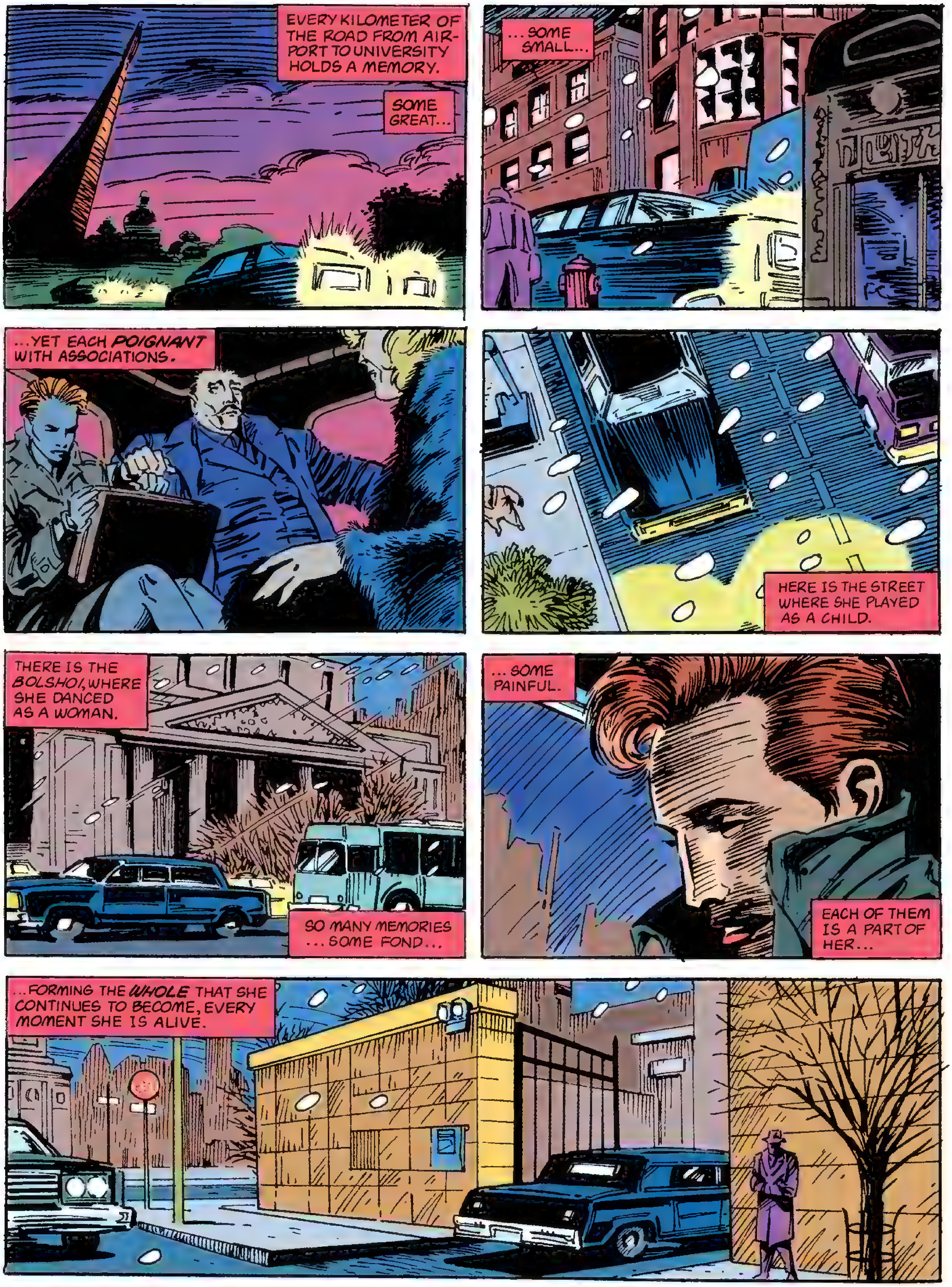
[illegible]ere the boundaries meet a[illegible] [illegible]ictions ex[illegible] side by s[illegible]

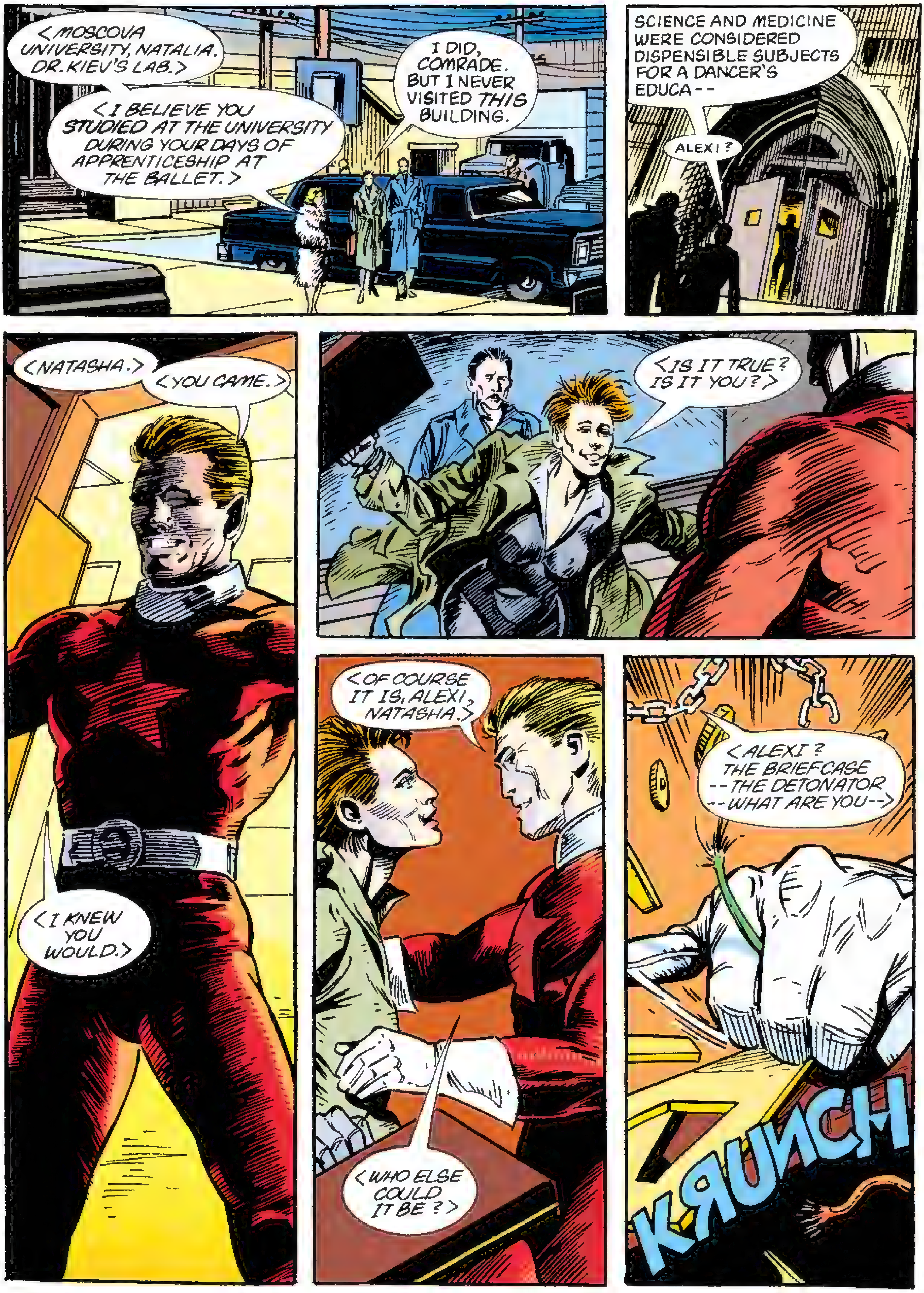
[illegible] God and [illegible] battlefield is the heart of man."
—Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevski
(1880)

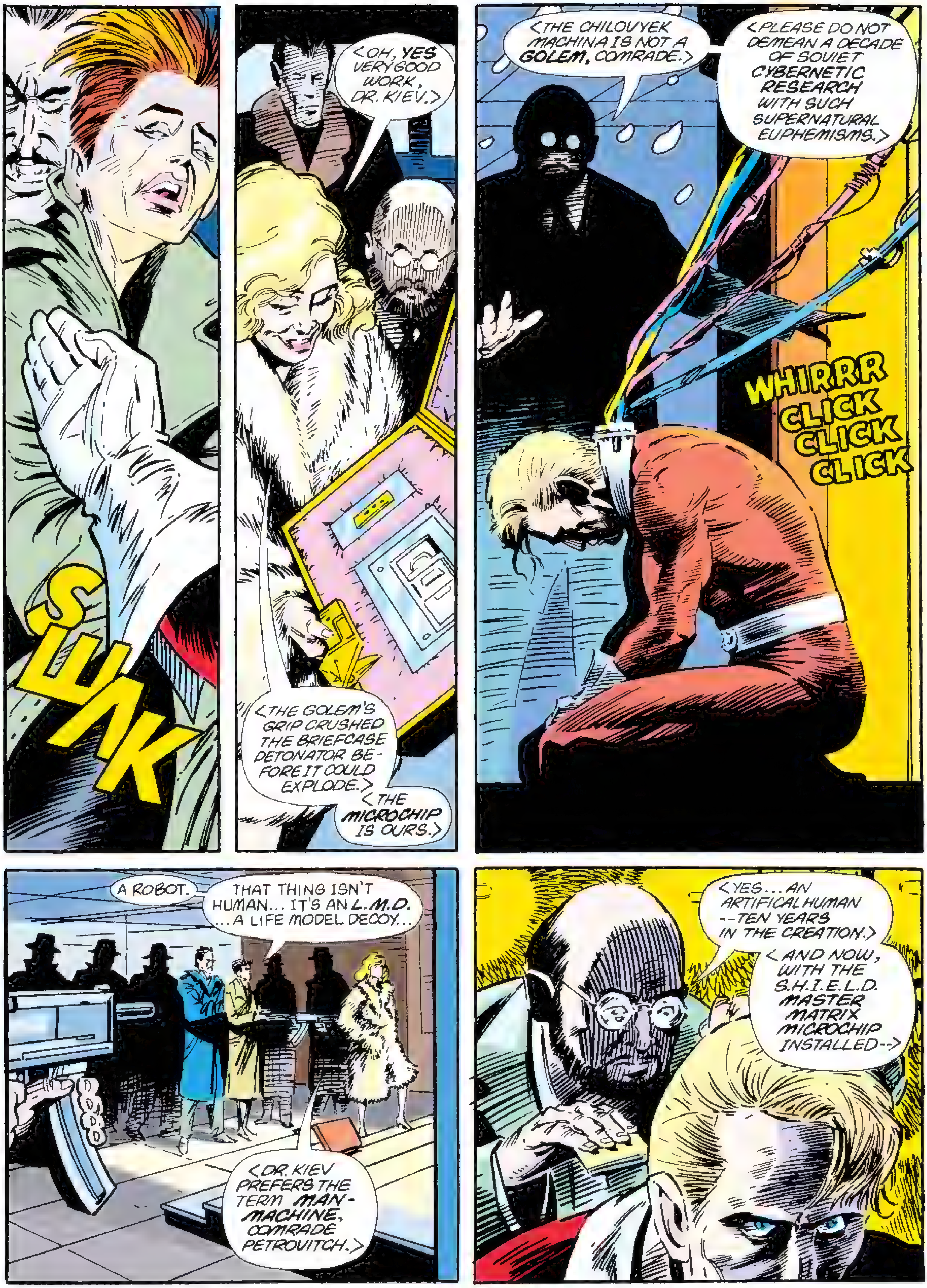

FEBRUARY 9, 1987...
5:10 A.M....
<KOPECK FOR YOUR THOUGHTS, NATALIA ALIANOVA.>
<YOU'RE THINKING OF YOUR DEAR ALEXI, ARE YOU NOT?>
<YOU ARE. I CAN TELL.>
<WHY SPOIL SUCH A CHARMING LOVER'S REUNION WITH THE CAPITALISTIC CYNICISM OF A TRADE?>
<SIMPLY GIVE ME THE L.M.D. MICROCHIP, AND I ASSURE YOU-->
THE MICROCHIP STAYS IN THE BRIEFCASE--
--UNTIL I SEE ALEXI.
TRY TO REMOVE IT AND THE CASE WILL EXPLODE...
AR MED
... DESTROYING THE CASE--AND ANYTHING ELSE WITHIN A HUNDRED YARDS.
<YOU ARE A COLD WOMAN, NATALIA...>

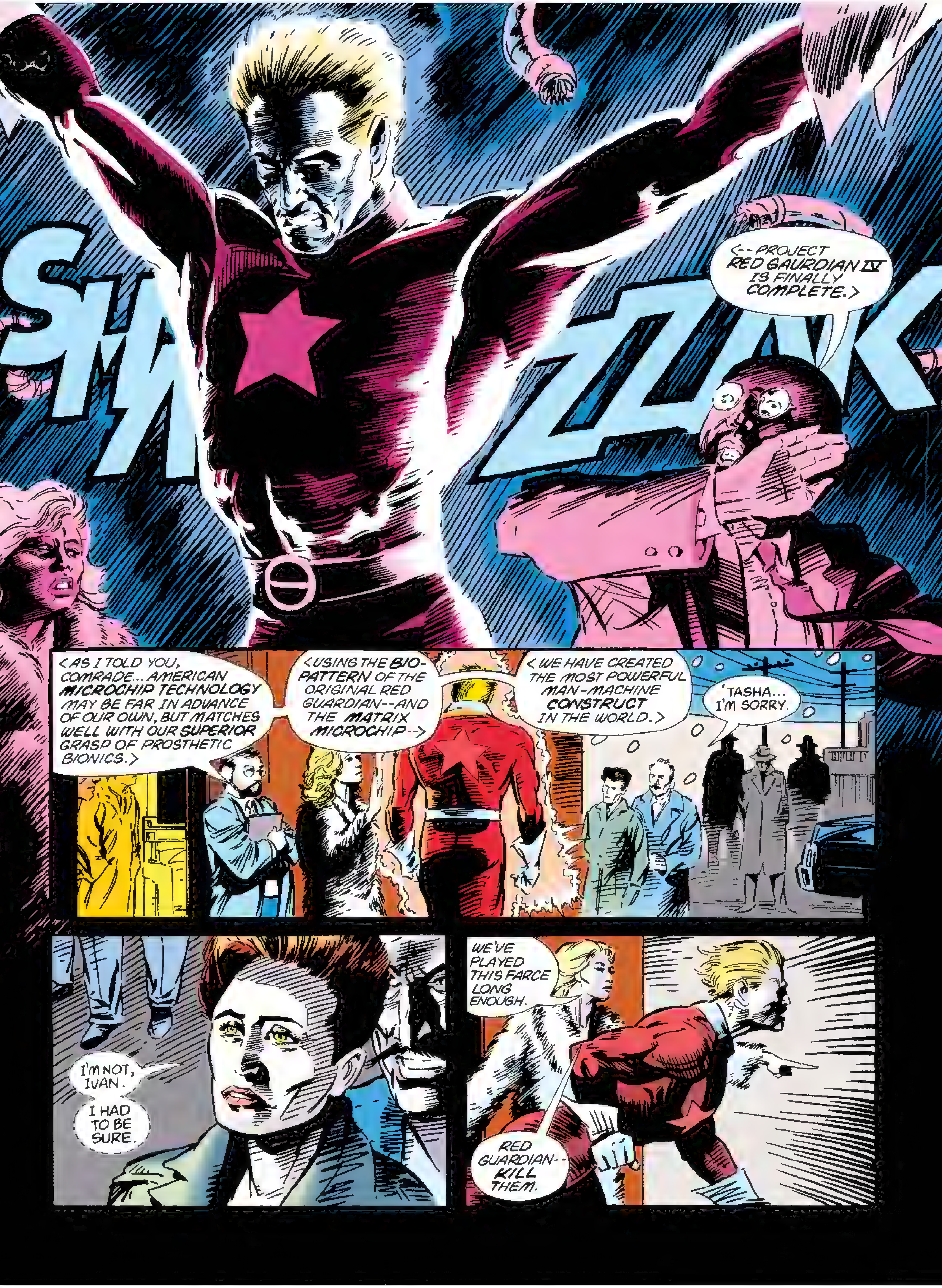


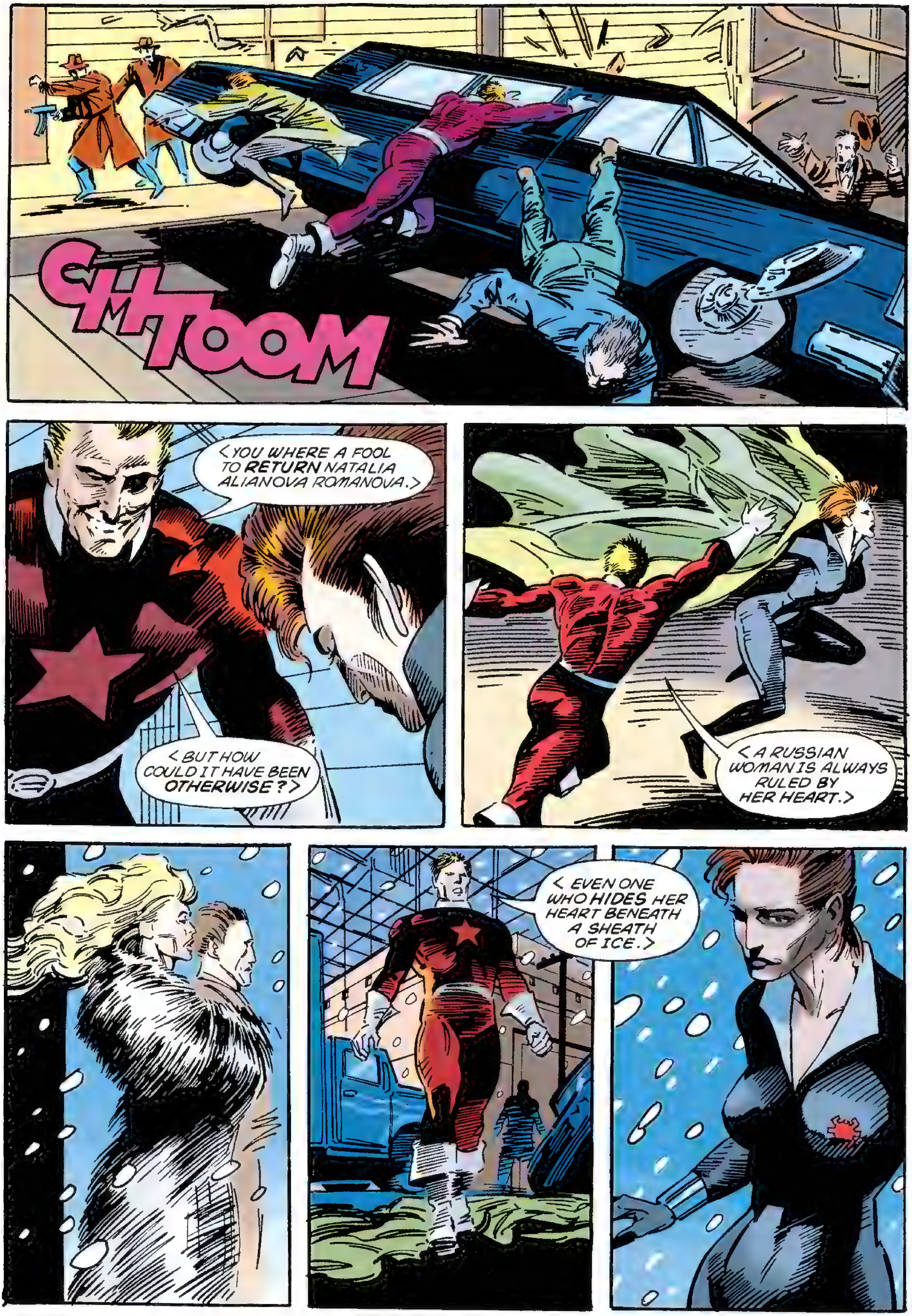

<... WATCH ME DANCE.>
<IF I AM A WINTER, ALEXI ANDREOVITCH...>
<...THEN YOUR LOVE IS THE SUMMER SUN THAT MELTS MY SNOW...>
FEBRUARY 9, 1987...
6:00 A.M....
MOSCOVA...
LOOKS LIKE OUR WELCOME COMMITTEE IS A WHOLE TROOP OF K.G.B.
TELL ME AGAIN HOW THIS IS ALL PART OF YOUR MASTER PLAN...

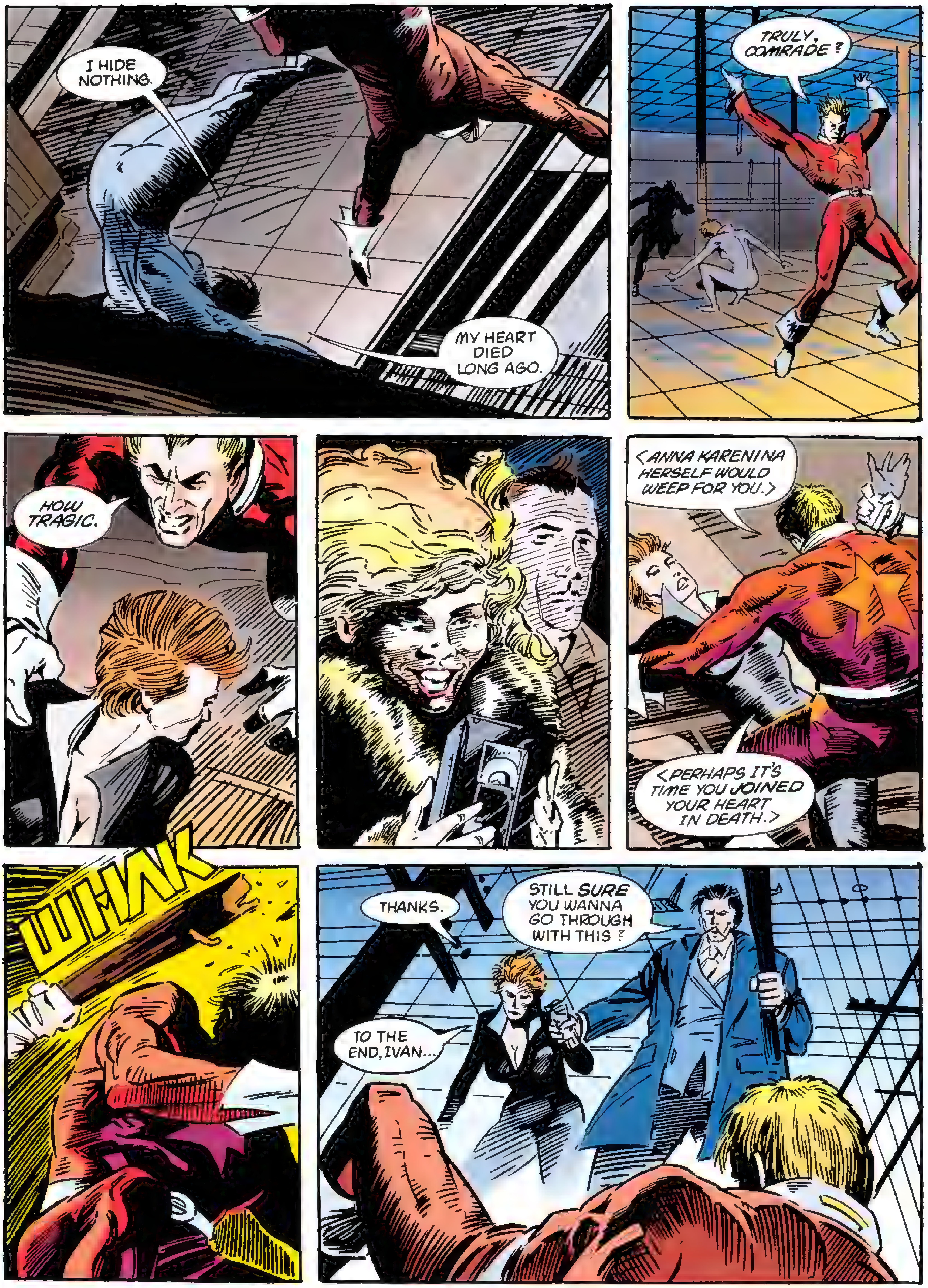

EVERY KILOMETER OF THE ROAD FROM AIRPORT TO UNIVERSITY HOLDS A MEMORY.
SOME GREAT...
...SOME SMALL...
...YET EACH *POIGNANT* WITH ASSOCIATIONS.
HERE IS THE STREET WHERE SHE PLAYED AS A CHILD.
THERE IS THE *BOLSHOI*, WHERE SHE DANCED AS A WOMAN.
SO MANY MEMORIES ...SOME FOND...
...SOME PAINFUL.
EACH OF THEM IS A PART OF HER...
...FORMING THE *WHOLE* THAT SHE CONTINUES TO BECOME, EVERY MOMENT SHE IS ALIVE.

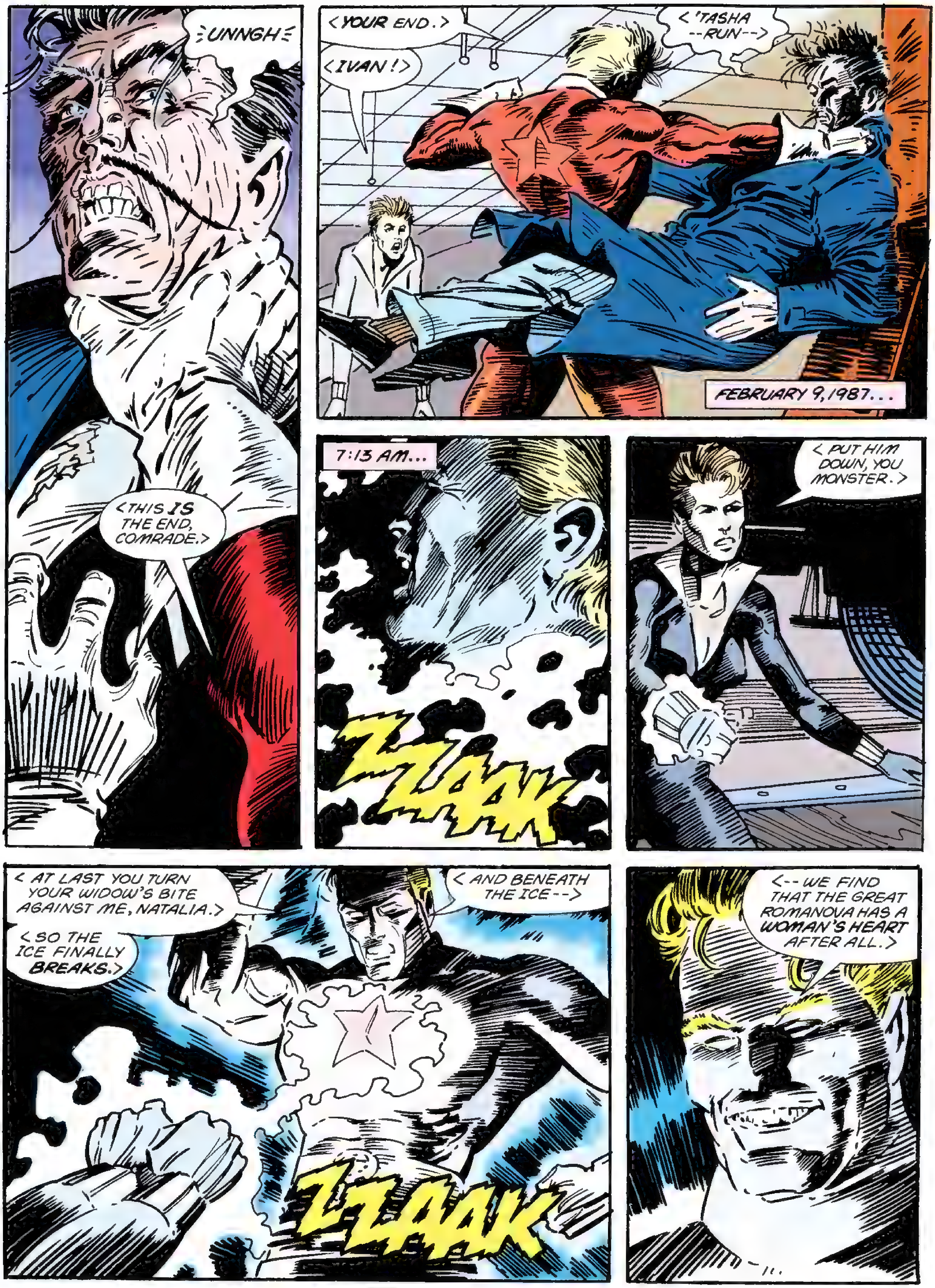

<MOSCOVA UNIVERSITY, NATALIA. DR. KIEV'S LAB.>
<I BELIEVE YOU STUDIED AT THE UNIVERSITY DURING YOUR DAYS OF APPRENTICESHIP AT THE BALLET.>
I DID, COMRADE. BUT I NEVER VISITED THIS BUILDING.
SCIENCE AND MEDICINE WERE CONSIDERED DISPENSIBLE SUBJECTS FOR A DANCER'S EDUCA--
ALEXI?
<NATASHA.>
<YOU CAME.>
<I KNEW YOU WOULD.>
<IS IT TRUE? IS IT YOU?>
<OF COURSE IT IS, ALEXI, NATASHA.>
<WHO ELSE COULD IT BE?>
<ALEXI? THE BRIEFCASE --THE DETONATOR --WHAT ARE YOU-->
KRUNCH

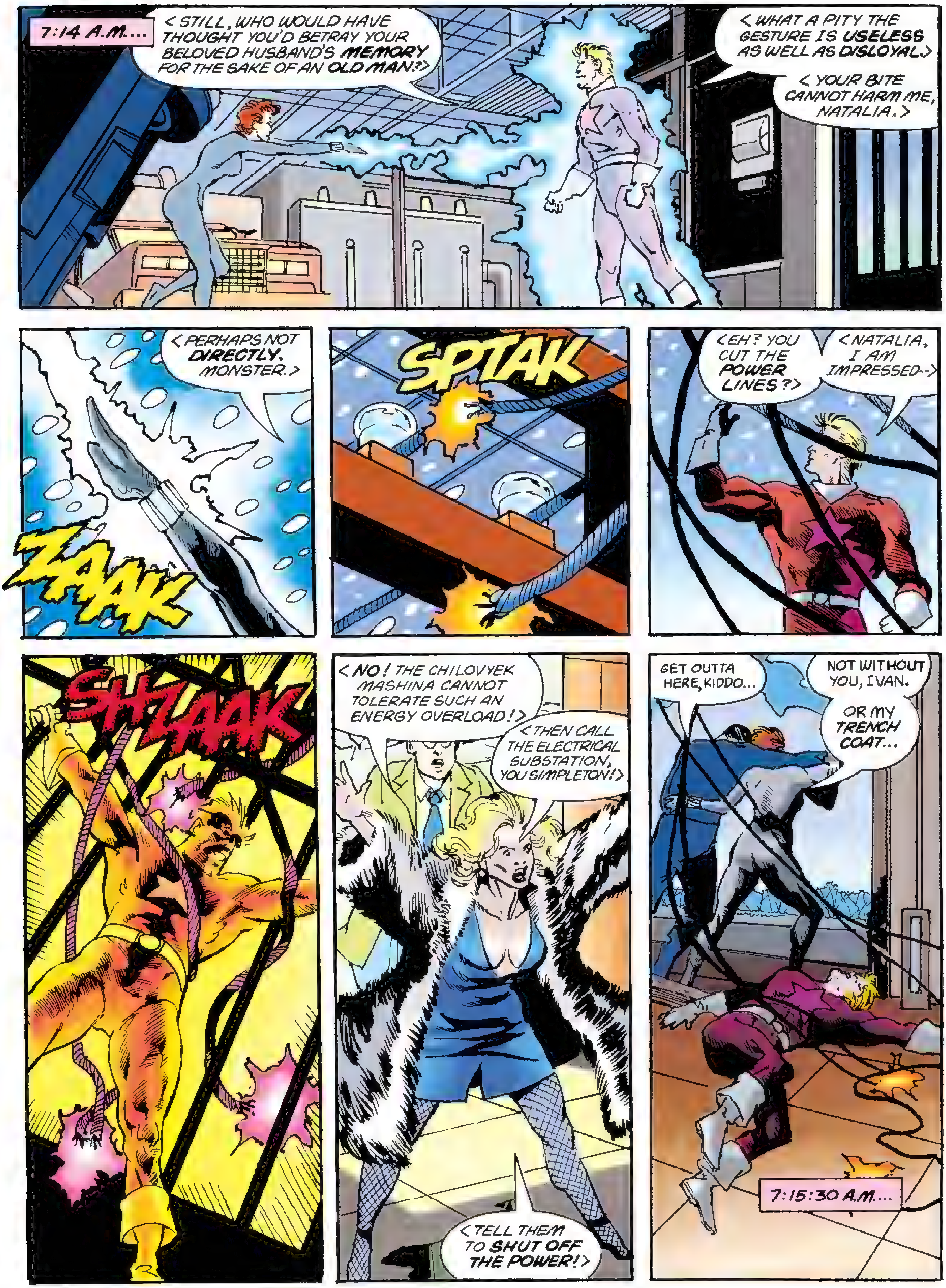

SWAK
<OH, YES VERY GOOD WORK, DR. KIEV.>
<THE GOLEM'S GRIP CRUSHED THE BRIEFCASE DETONATOR BEFORE IT COULD EXPLODE.>
<THE MICROCHIP IS OURS.>
<THE CHILOVYEK MACHINA IS NOT A GOLEM, COMRADE.>
<PLEASE DO NOT DEMEAN A DECADE OF SOVIET CYBERNETIC RESEARCH WITH SUCH SUPERNATURAL EUPHEMISMS.>
WHIRRR CLICK CLICK CLICK
A ROBOT.
THAT THING ISN'T HUMAN... IT'S AN L.M.D. ...A LIFE MODEL DECOY...
<DR. KIEV PREFERS THE TERM MAN-MACHINE, COMRADE PETROVITCH.>
<YES... AN ARTIFICAL HUMAN --TEN YEARS IN THE CREATION.>
<AND NOW, WITH THE S.H.I.E.L.D. MASTER MATRIX MICROCHIP INSTALLED-->

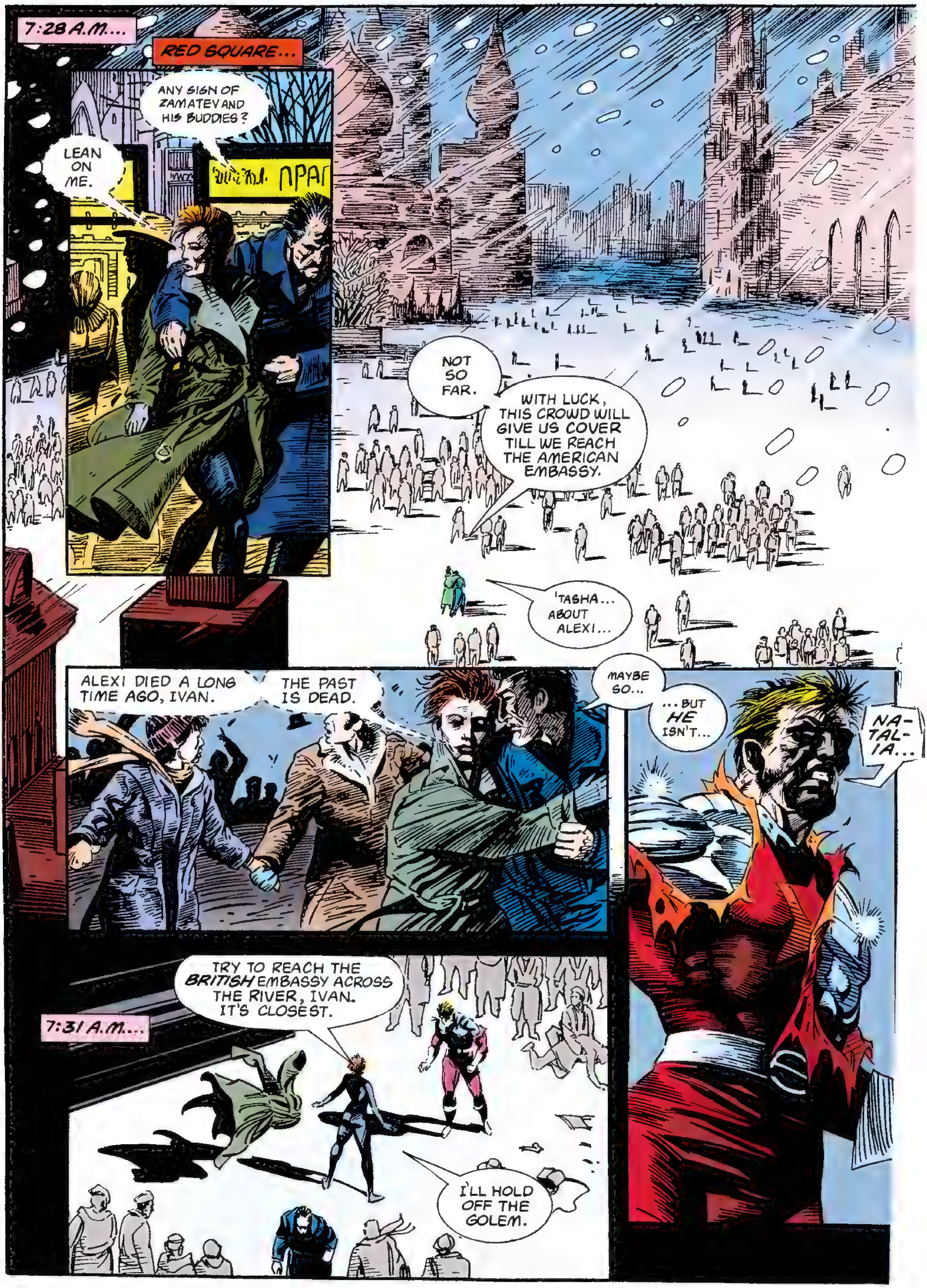

SHZZAK
<--PROJECT RED GAURDIAN IV IS FINALLY COMPLETE.>
<AS I TOLD YOU, COMRADE... AMERICAN MICROCHIP TECHNOLOGY MAY BE FAR IN ADVANCE OF OUR OWN, BUT MATCHES WELL WITH OUR SUPERIOR GRASP OF PROSTHETIC BIONICS.>
<USING THE BIO-PATTERN OF THE ORIGINAL RED GUARDIAN--AND THE MATRIX MICROCHIP-->
<WE HAVE CREATED THE MOST POWERFUL MAN-MACHINE CONSTRUCT IN THE WORLD.>
'TASHA... I'M SORRY.
I'M NOT, IVAN.
I HAD TO BE SURE.
WE'VE PLAYED THIS FARCE LONG ENOUGH.
RED GUARDIAN--KILL THEM.

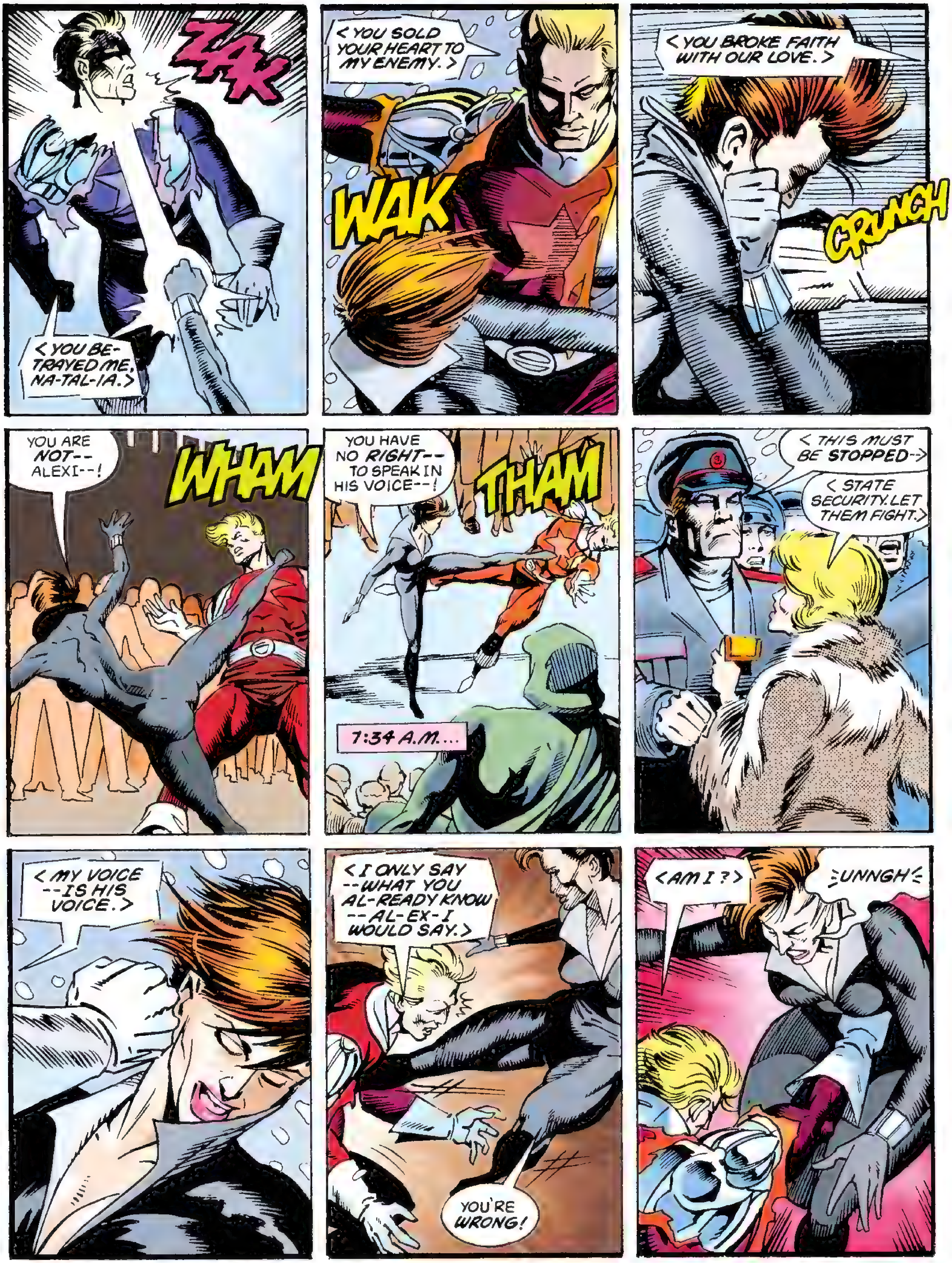

CHTOOM
<YOU WHERE A FOOL TO RETURN NATALIA ALIANOVA ROMANOVA.>
<BUT HOW COULD IT HAVE BEEN OTHERWISE?>
<A RUSSIAN WOMAN IS ALWAYS RULED BY HER HEART.>
<EVEN ONE WHO HIDES HER HEART BENEATH A SHEATH OF ICE.>

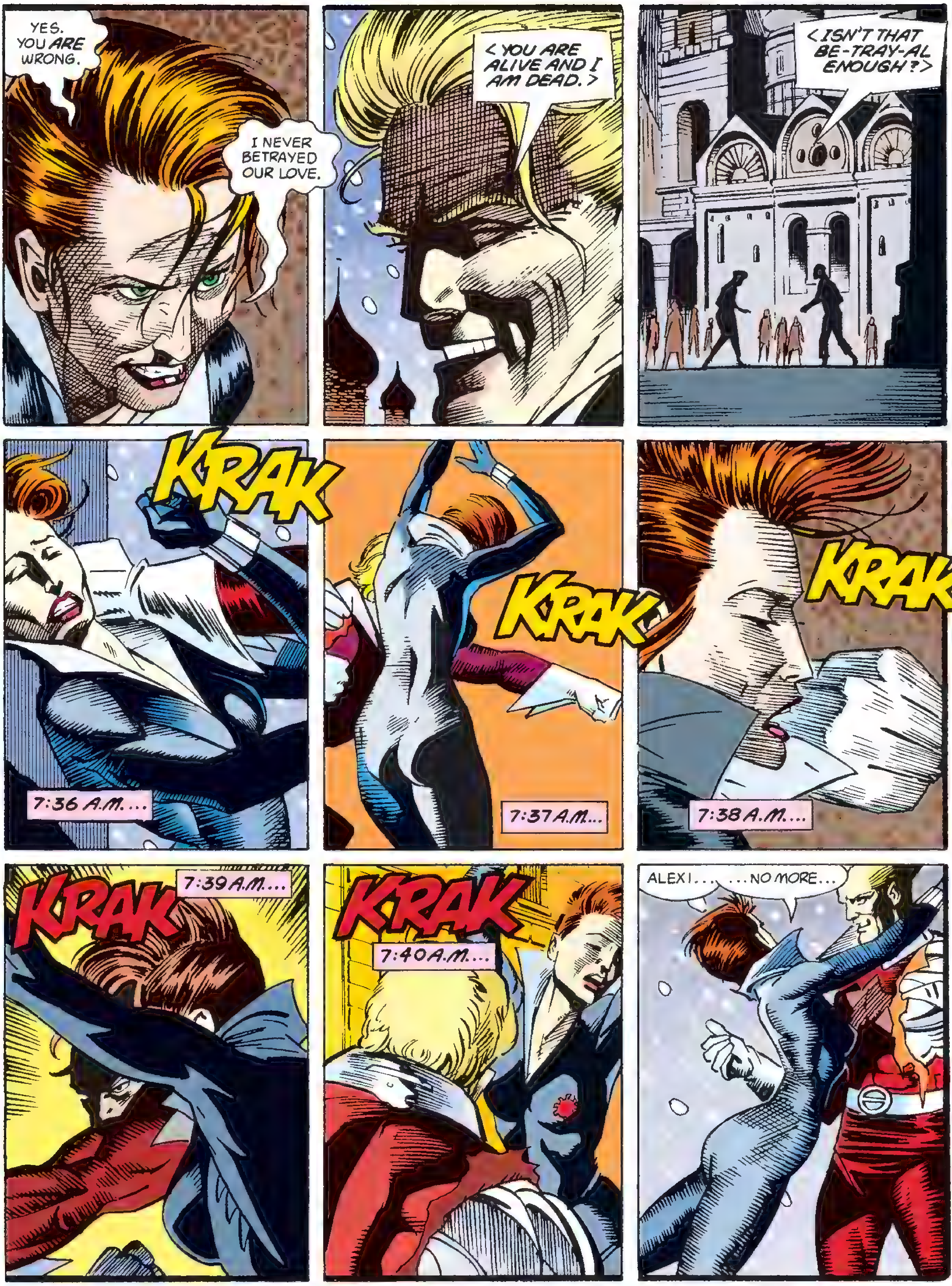

I HIDE NOTHING.
MY HEART DIED LONG AGO.
TRULY, COMRADE?
HOW TRAGIC.
<ANNA KARENINA HERSELF WOULD WEEP FOR YOU.>
<PERHAPS IT'S TIME YOU JOINED YOUR HEART IN DEATH.>
WHAK
THANKS.
STILL SURE YOU WANNA GO THROUGH WITH THIS?
TO THE END, IVAN...

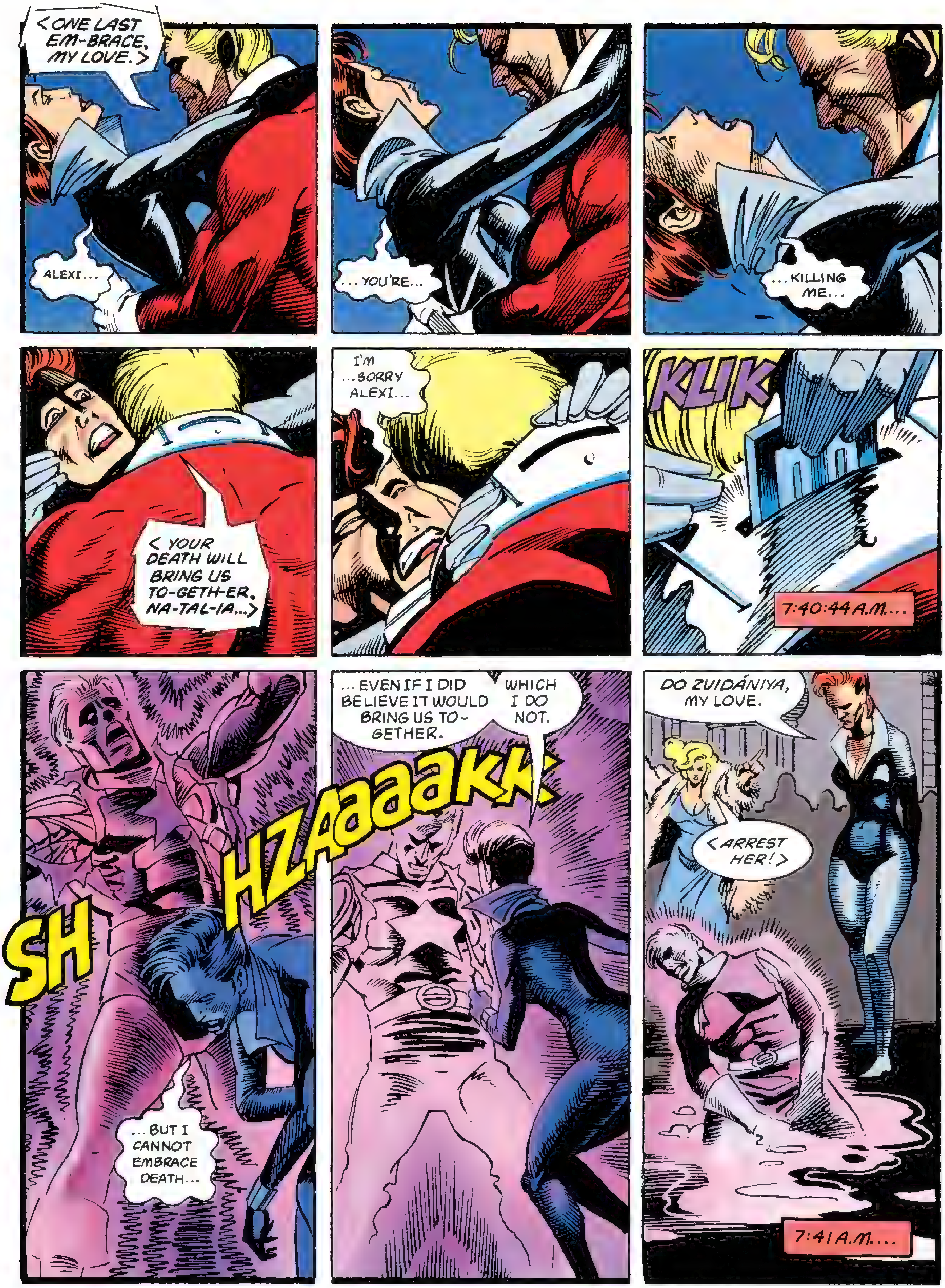

UNNGH
<THIS IS THE END, COMRADE.>
<YOUR END.>
<IVAN!>
<'TASHA --RUN-->
FEBRUARY 9, 1987...
7:13 AM...
ZZAAK
<PUT HIM DOWN, YOU MONSTER.>
<AT LAST YOU TURN YOUR WIDOW'S BITE AGAINST ME, NATALIA.>
<SO THE ICE FINALLY BREAKS.>
<AND BENEATH THE ICE-->
ZZAAK
<--WE FIND THAT THE GREAT ROMANOVA HAS A WOMAN'S HEART AFTER ALL.>

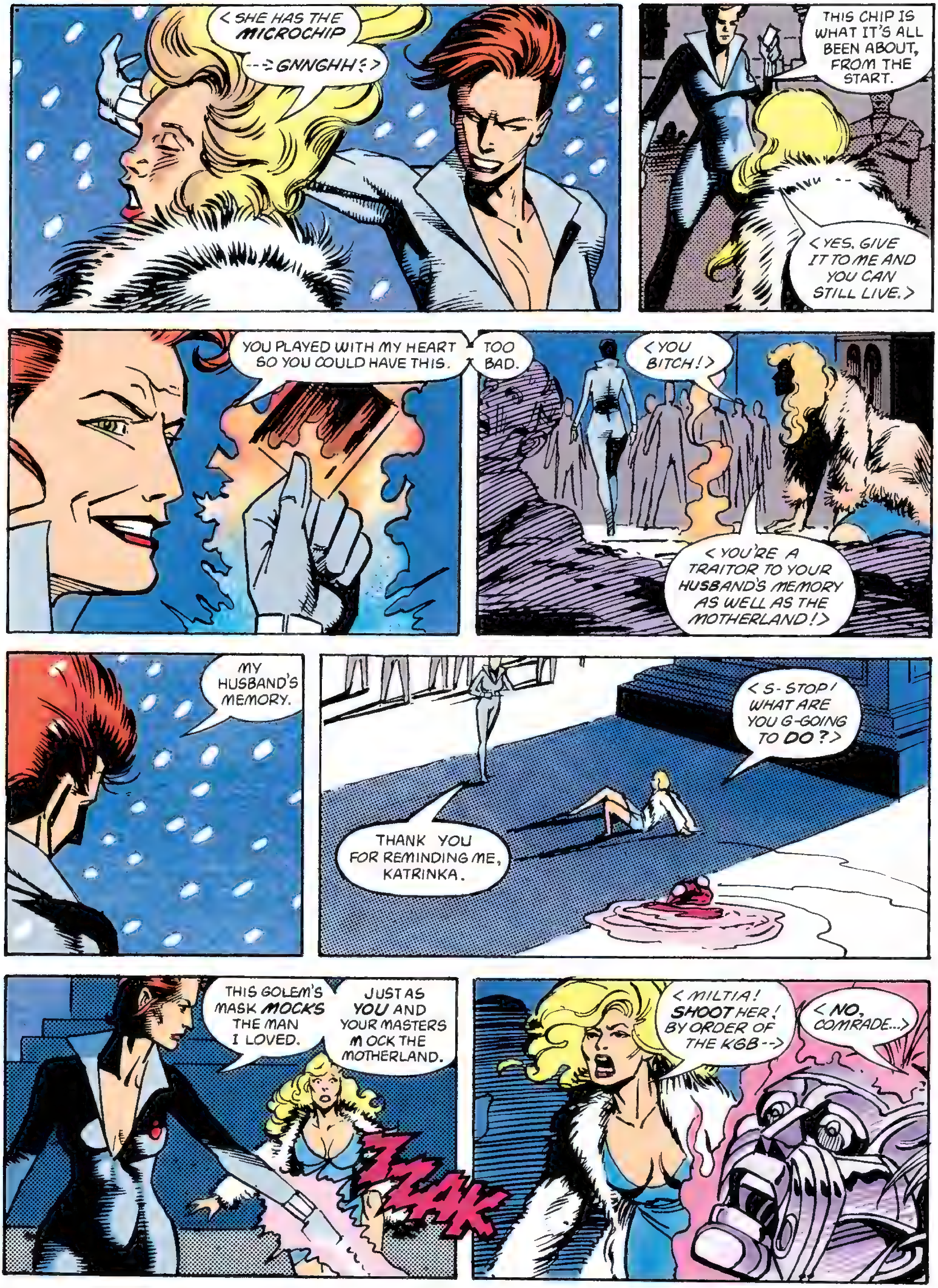

7:14 A.M....
<STILL, WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT YOU'D BETRAY YOUR BELOVED HUSBAND'S MEMORY FOR THE SAKE OF AN OLD MAN?>
<WHAT A PITY THE GESTURE IS USELESS AS WELL AS DISLOYAL.>
<YOUR BITE CANNOT HARM ME, NATALIA.>
<PERHAPS NOT DIRECTLY, MONSTER.>
ZAAAK
SPTAK
<EH? YOU CUT THE POWER LINES?>
<NATALIA, I AM IMPRESSED-->
SHZAAK
<NO! THE CHILOVYEK MASHINA CANNOT TOLERATE SUCH AN ENERGY OVERLOAD!>
<THEN CALL THE ELECTRICAL SUBSTATION, YOU SIMPLETON!>
<TELL THEM TO SHUT OFF THE POWER!>
GET OUTTA HERE, KIDDO...
NOT WITHOUT YOU, IVAN.
OR MY TRENCH COAT...
7:15:30 A.M....

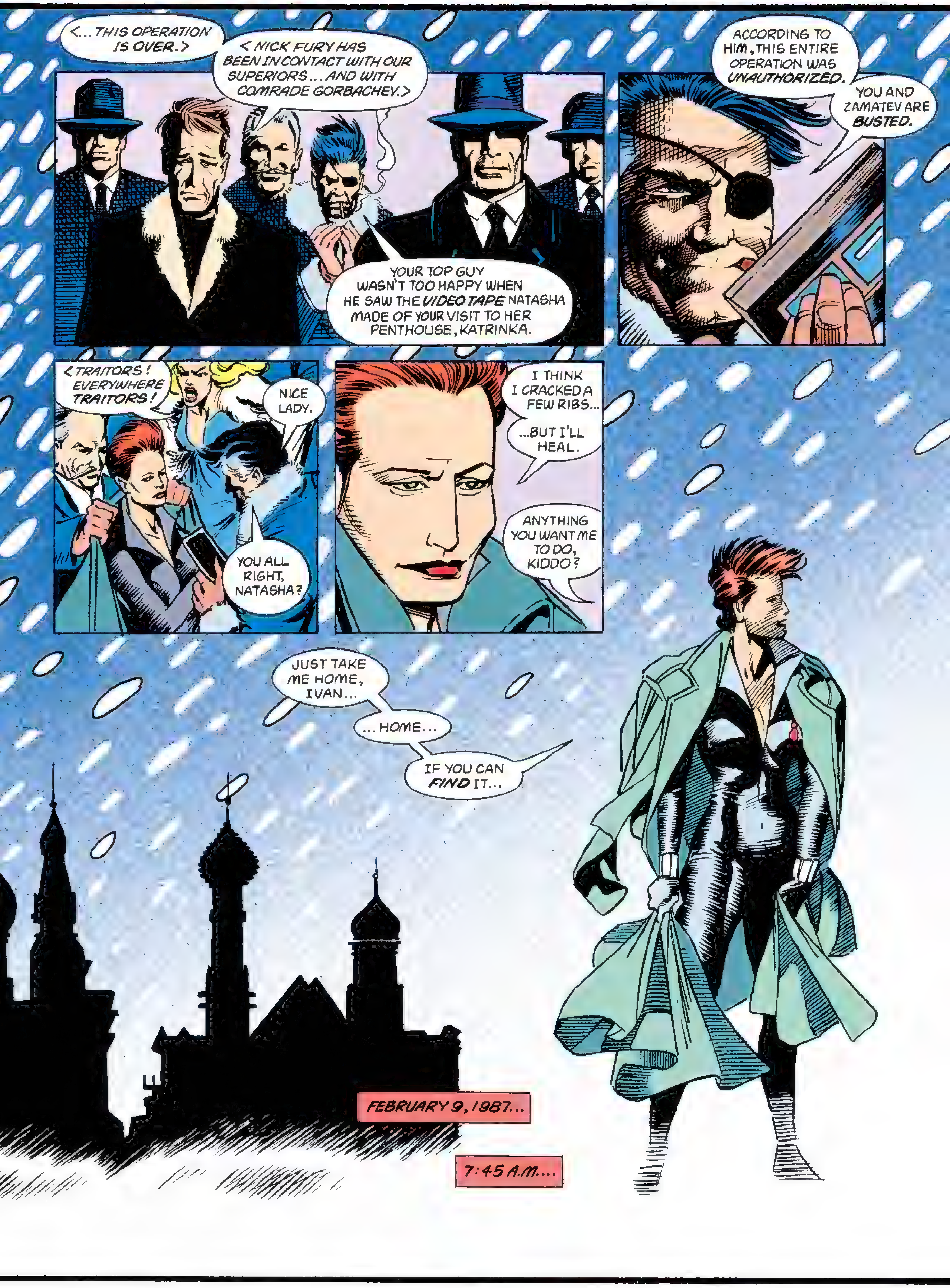

7:28 A.M....
RED SQUARE...
ANY SIGN OF ZAMATEV AND HIS BUDDIES?
LEAN ON ME.
ПРАГ
NOT SO FAR.
WITH LUCK, THIS CROWD WILL GIVE US COVER TILL WE REACH THE AMERICAN EMBASSY.
'TASHA... ABOUT ALEXI...
ALEXI DIED A LONG TIME AGO, IVAN.
THE PAST IS DEAD.
MAYBE SO...
...BUT HE ISN'T...
NA-TAL-IA...
TRY TO REACH THE BRITISH EMBASSY ACROSS THE RIVER, IVAN. IT'S CLOSEST.
7:31 A.M....
I'LL HOLD OFF THE GOLEM.

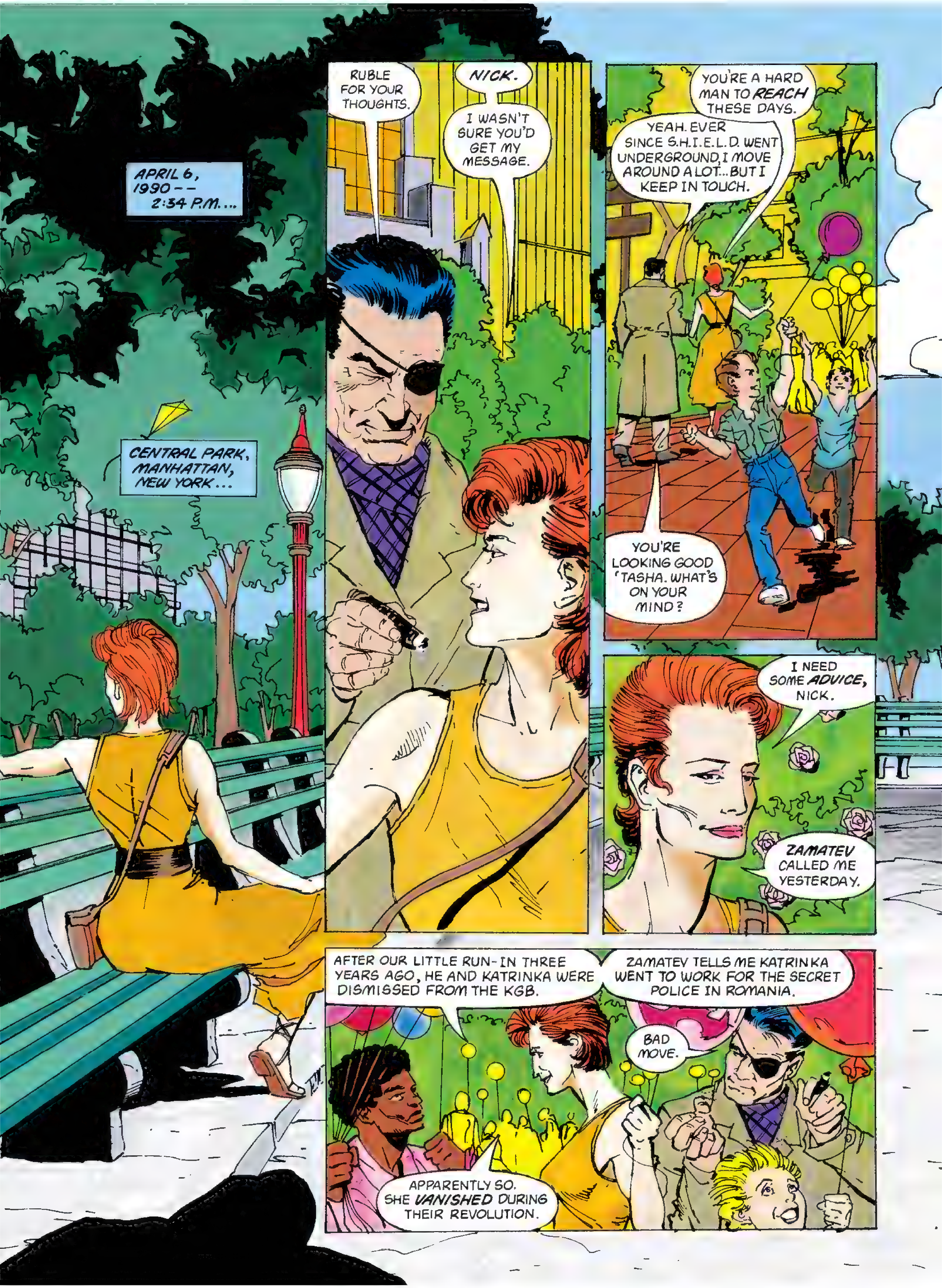

ZAK
<YOU BETRAYED ME, NA-TAL-IA.>
<YOU SOLD YOUR HEART TO MY ENEMY.>
WAK
<YOU BROKE FAITH WITH OUR LOVE.>
CRUNCH
YOU ARE NOT-- ALEXI--!
WHAM
YOU HAVE NO RIGHT-- TO SPEAK IN HIS VOICE--!
THAM
7:34 A.M. ...
<THIS MUST BE STOPPED-->
<STATE SECURITY. LET THEM FIGHT.>
<MY VOICE --IS HIS VOICE.>
<I ONLY SAY --WHAT YOU AL-READY KNOW --AL-EX-I WOULD SAY.>
YOU'RE WRONG!
<AM I?>
UNNGH

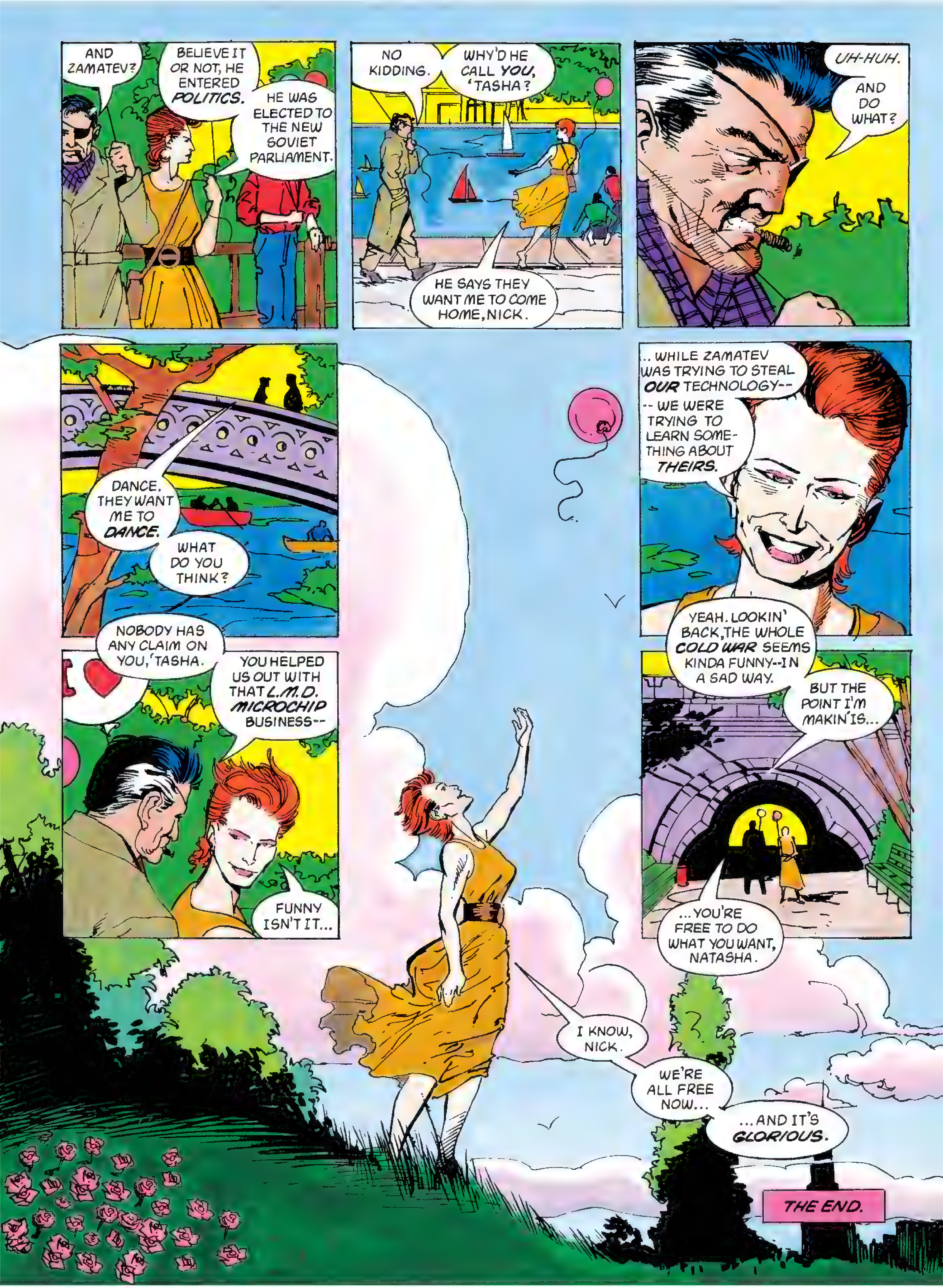

YES. YOU *ARE* WRONG.
I NEVER BETRAYED OUR LOVE.
<YOU ARE ALIVE AND I AM DEAD.>
<ISN'T THAT BE-TRAY-AL ENOUGH?>
KRAK
7:36 A.M....
KRAK
7:37 A.M....
KRAK
7:38 A.M....
KRAK
7:39 A.M....
KRAK
7:40 A.M....
ALEXI...
...NO MORE...


<ONE LAST EM-BRACE, MY LOVE.>
ALEXI...
...YOU'RE...
...KILLING ME...
< YOUR DEATH WILL BRING US TO-GETH-ER, NA-TAL-IA...>
I'M ...SORRY ALEXI...
KLIK
7:40:44 A.M....
SHHZAaaaKK!
...BUT I CANNOT EMBRACE DEATH...
...EVEN IF I DID BELIEVE IT WOULD BRING US TO-GETHER.
WHICH I DO NOT.
DO ZVIDÁNIYA, MY LOVE.
<ARREST HER!>
7:41 A.M....


< SHE HAS THE MICROCHIP
--> GNNGHH! >
THIS CHIP IS WHAT IT'S ALL BEEN ABOUT, FROM THE START.
< YES. GIVE IT TO ME AND YOU CAN STILL LIVE. >
YOU PLAYED WITH MY HEART SO YOU COULD HAVE THIS.
TOO BAD.
< YOU BITCH! >
< YOU'RE A TRAITOR TO YOUR HUSBAND'S MEMORY AS WELL AS THE MOTHERLAND! >
MY HUSBAND'S MEMORY.
< S-STOP! WHAT ARE YOU G-GOING TO DO? >
THANK YOU FOR REMINDING ME, KATRINKA.
THIS GOLEM'S MASK MOCKS THE MAN I LOVED.
JUST AS YOU AND YOUR MASTERS MOCK THE MOTHERLAND.
ZZAK
< MILTIA! SHOOT HER! BY ORDER OF THE KGB -->
< NO, COMRADE...>


<...THIS OPERATION IS OVER.>
< NICK FURY HAS BEEN IN CONTACT WITH OUR SUPERIORS... AND WITH COMRADE GORBACHEV.>
YOUR TOP GUY WASN'T TOO HAPPY WHEN HE SAW THE *VIDEO TAPE* NATASHA MADE OF YOUR VISIT TO HER PENTHOUSE, KATRINKA.
ACCORDING TO HIM, THIS ENTIRE OPERATION WAS *UNAUTHORIZED.*
YOU AND ZAMATEV ARE *BUSTED.*
< TRAITORS! EVERYWHERE TRAITORS!
NICE LADY.
YOU ALL RIGHT, NATASHA?
I THINK I CRACKED A FEW RIBS...
...BUT I'LL HEAL.
ANYTHING YOU WANT ME TO DO, KIDDO?
JUST TAKE ME HOME, IVAN...
...HOME...
IF YOU CAN *FIND* IT...
FEBRUARY 9, 1987...
7:45 A.M....


APRIL 6, 1990 -- 2:34 P.M....
CENTRAL PARK, MANHATTAN, NEW YORK...
RUBLE FOR YOUR THOUGHTS.
NICK.
I WASN'T SURE YOU'D GET MY MESSAGE.
YOU'RE A HARD MAN TO *REACH* THESE DAYS.
YEAH. EVER SINCE S.H.I.E.L.D. WENT UNDERGROUND, I MOVE AROUND A LOT...BUT I KEEP IN TOUCH.
YOU'RE LOOKING GOOD 'TASHA. WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
I NEED SOME *ADVICE*, NICK.
ZAMATEV CALLED ME YESTERDAY.
AFTER OUR LITTLE RUN-IN THREE YEARS AGO, HE AND KATRINKA WERE DISMISSED FROM THE KGB.
ZAMATEV TELLS ME KATRINKA WENT TO WORK FOR THE SECRET POLICE IN ROMANIA.
BAD MOVE.
APPARENTLY SO. SHE *VANISHED* DURING THEIR REVOLUTION.


AND ZAMATEV?
BELIEVE IT OR NOT, HE ENTERED *POLITICS*.
HE WAS ELECTED TO THE NEW SOVIET PARLIAMENT.
NO KIDDING.
WHY'D HE CALL *YOU*, 'TASHA?
HE SAYS THEY WANT ME TO COME HOME, NICK.
UH-HUH.
AND DO WHAT?
DANCE. THEY WANT ME TO *DANCE*.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
NOBODY HAS ANY CLAIM ON YOU, 'TASHA.
YOU HELPED US OUT WITH THAT *L.M.D. MICROCHIP* BUSINESS--
FUNNY ISN'T IT...
...WHILE ZAMATEV WAS TRYING TO STEAL *OUR* TECHNOLOGY--
--WE WERE TRYING TO LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT *THEIRS*.
YEAH. LOOKIN' BACK, THE WHOLE *COLD WAR* SEEMS KINDA FUNNY--IN A SAD WAY.
BUT THE POINT I'M MAKIN' IS...
...YOU'RE FREE TO DO WHAT YOU WANT, NATASHA.
I KNOW, NICK.
WE'RE ALL FREE NOW...
...AND IT'S *GLORIOUS*.
THE END.

Raised to serve the Soviet state as a dancer in the Bolshoi ballet, *Natalia Alianovna Romanova* was taught loyalty but not love, discipline but not desire—until she met Alexi, who warmed her frozen soul.

Alexi—whose sudden death shattered her dreams.

To honor his memory, at the order of the State, she became the Cold War's greatest spy—a woman whose gift of stealth and heart of ice earned her the alias—BLACK WIDOW.

Her enemies were the heroes of the west: IRON MAN, HAWKEYE, and THE AVENGERS . . .

. . . until the day she learned her masters lied, that all their "truths" were cynical deceits.

In outrage she defected to the West, and became an ally to those she once opposed.

More than an ally: to Hawkeye, and later, DAREDEVIL, she became a lover . . .

But now, in the dying hours of the coldest war, the past returns—and with it her most profound challenge:

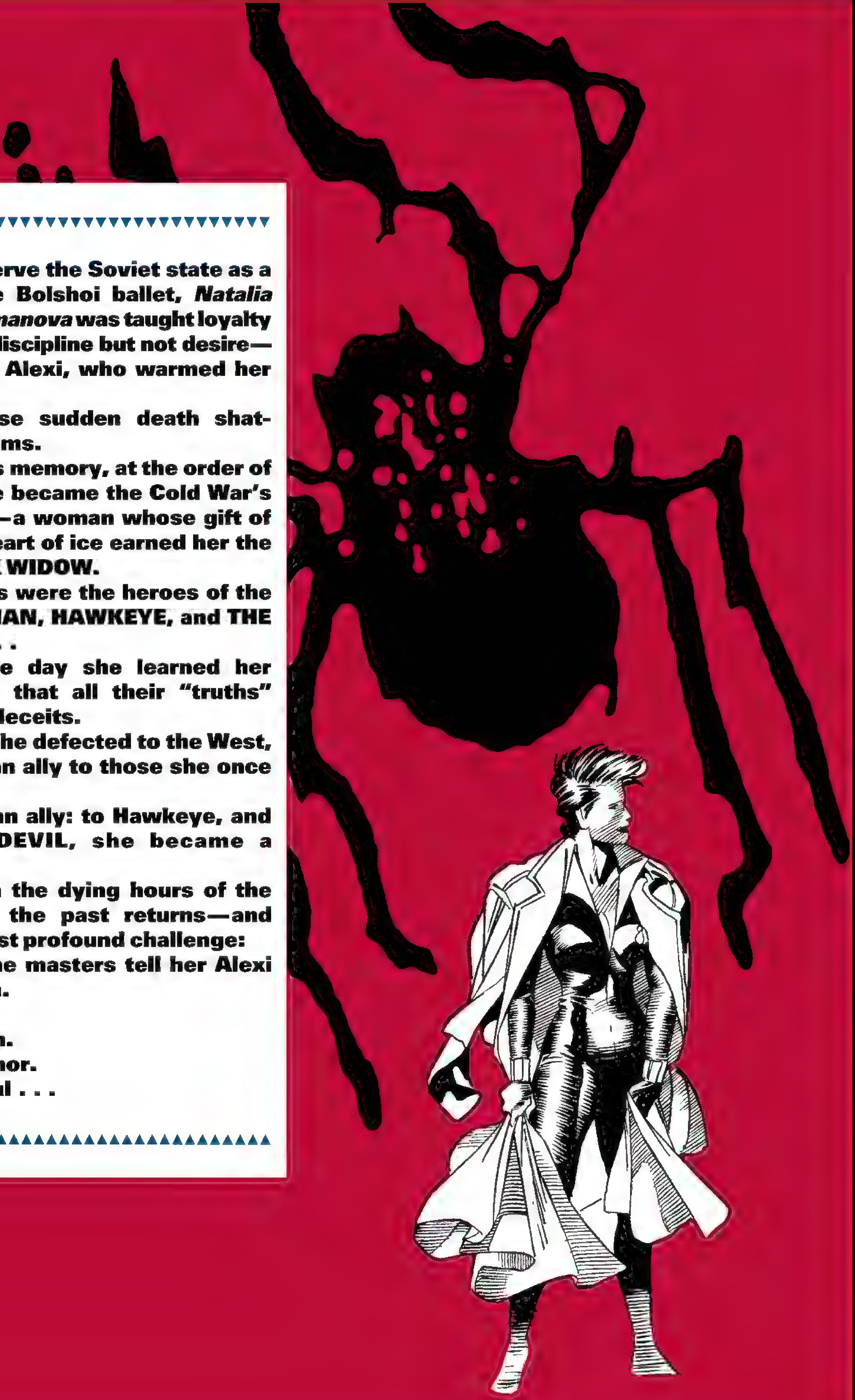
Her one-time masters tell her Alexi may live again.

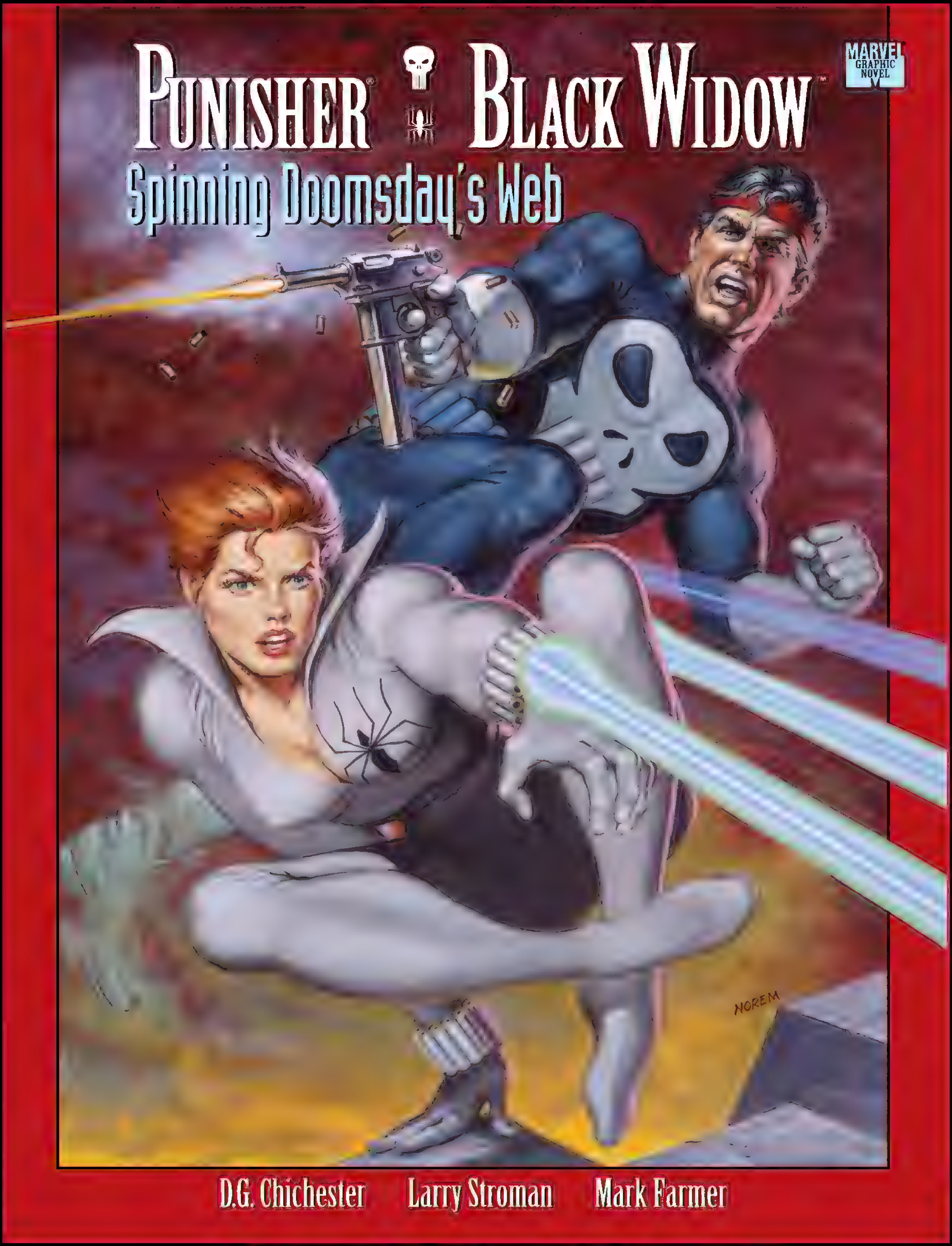
Their Price?

Not so much.

Only her honor.

Only her soul . . .




PUNISHER® BLACK WIDOW™
Spinning Doomsday's Web
MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL
NOREM
D.G. Chichester
Larry Stroman
Mark Farmer

D.G.Chichester
script

Larry Stroman
pencils

Mark Farmer
inks

Gloria Vasquez
colors

Michael Heisler
Chris Eliopoulos
letterers

Richard Ashford
assistant editor

Nelson Yomtov
editor

Tom Defalco
editor in chief

J.K.
design

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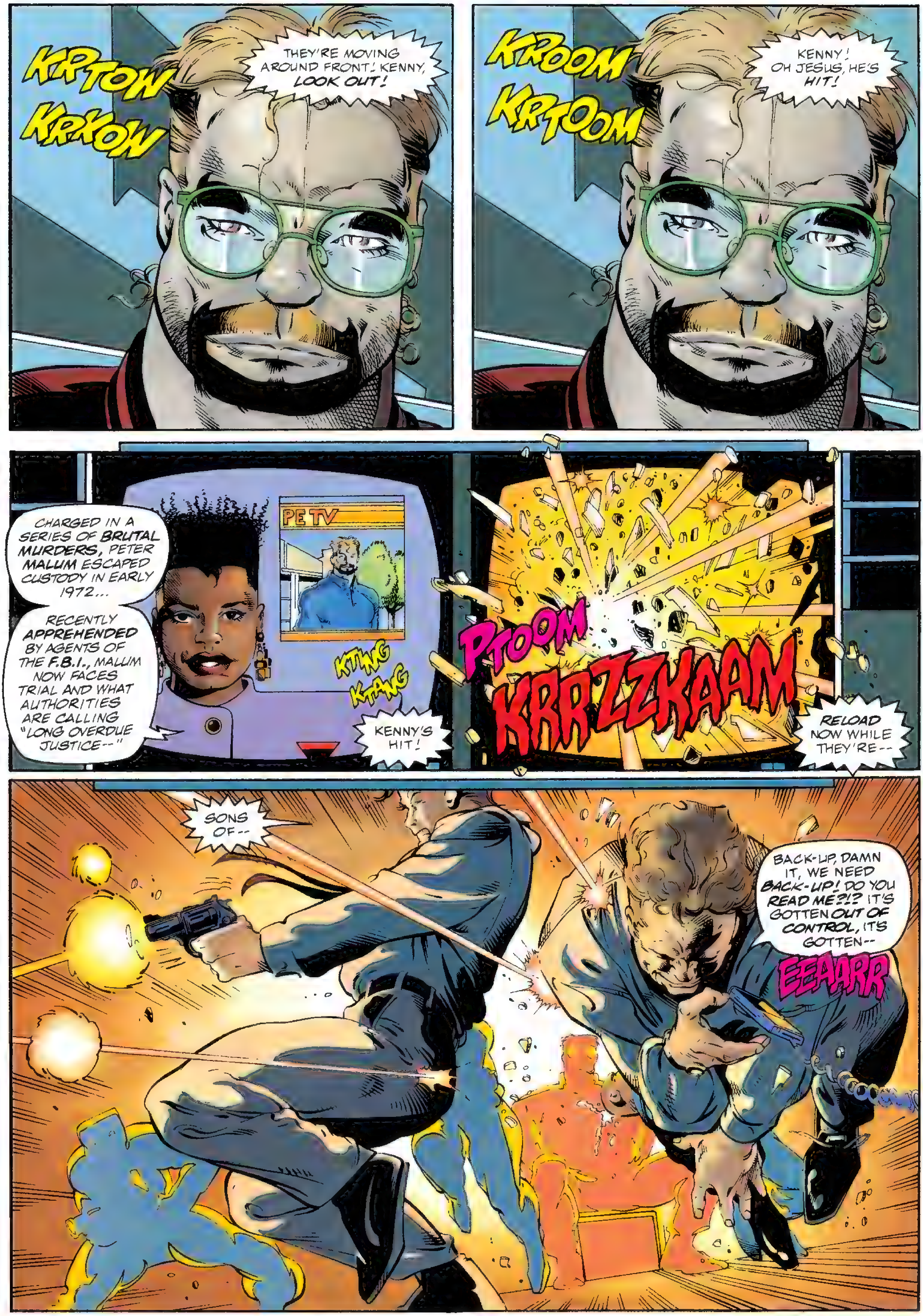
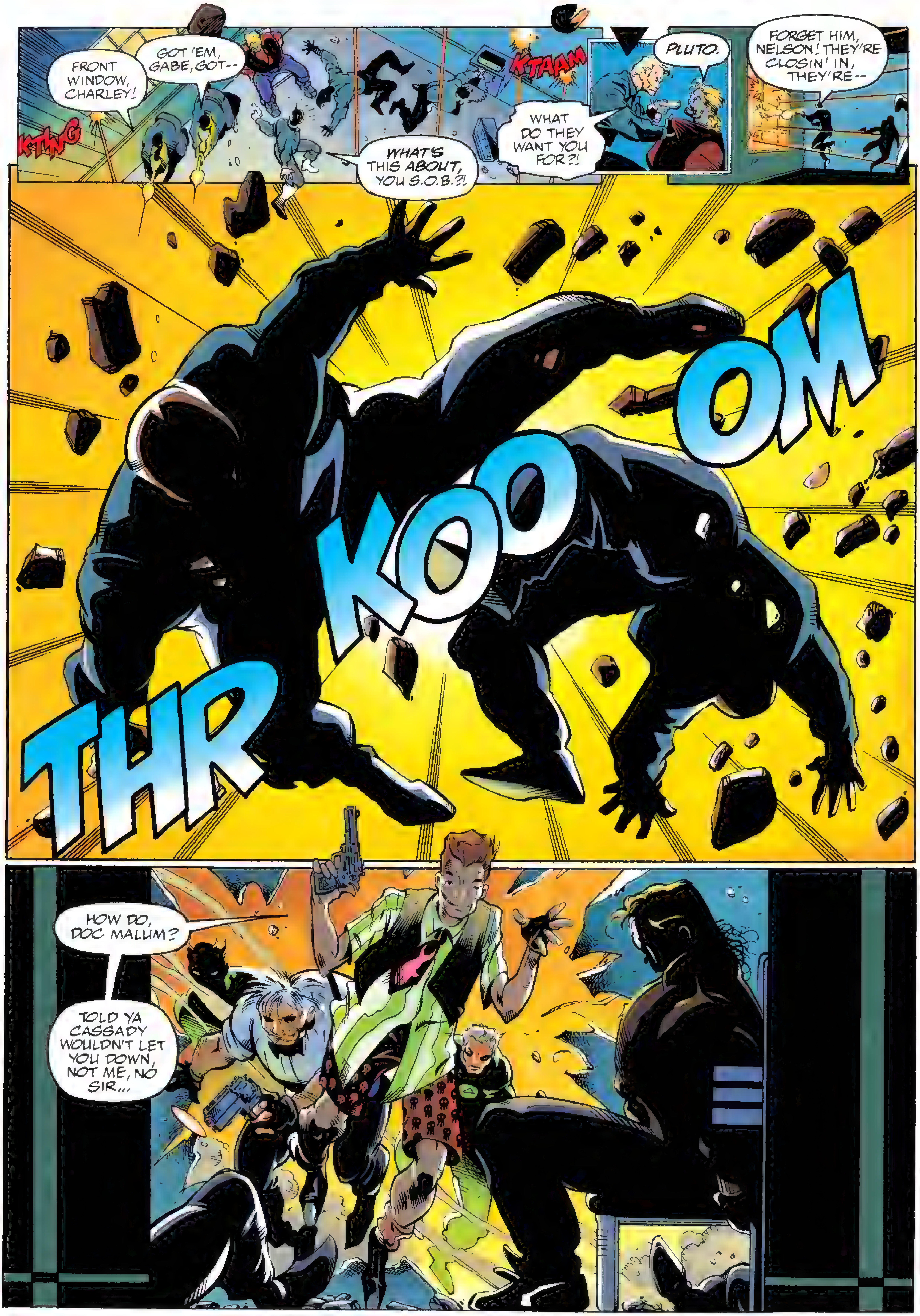
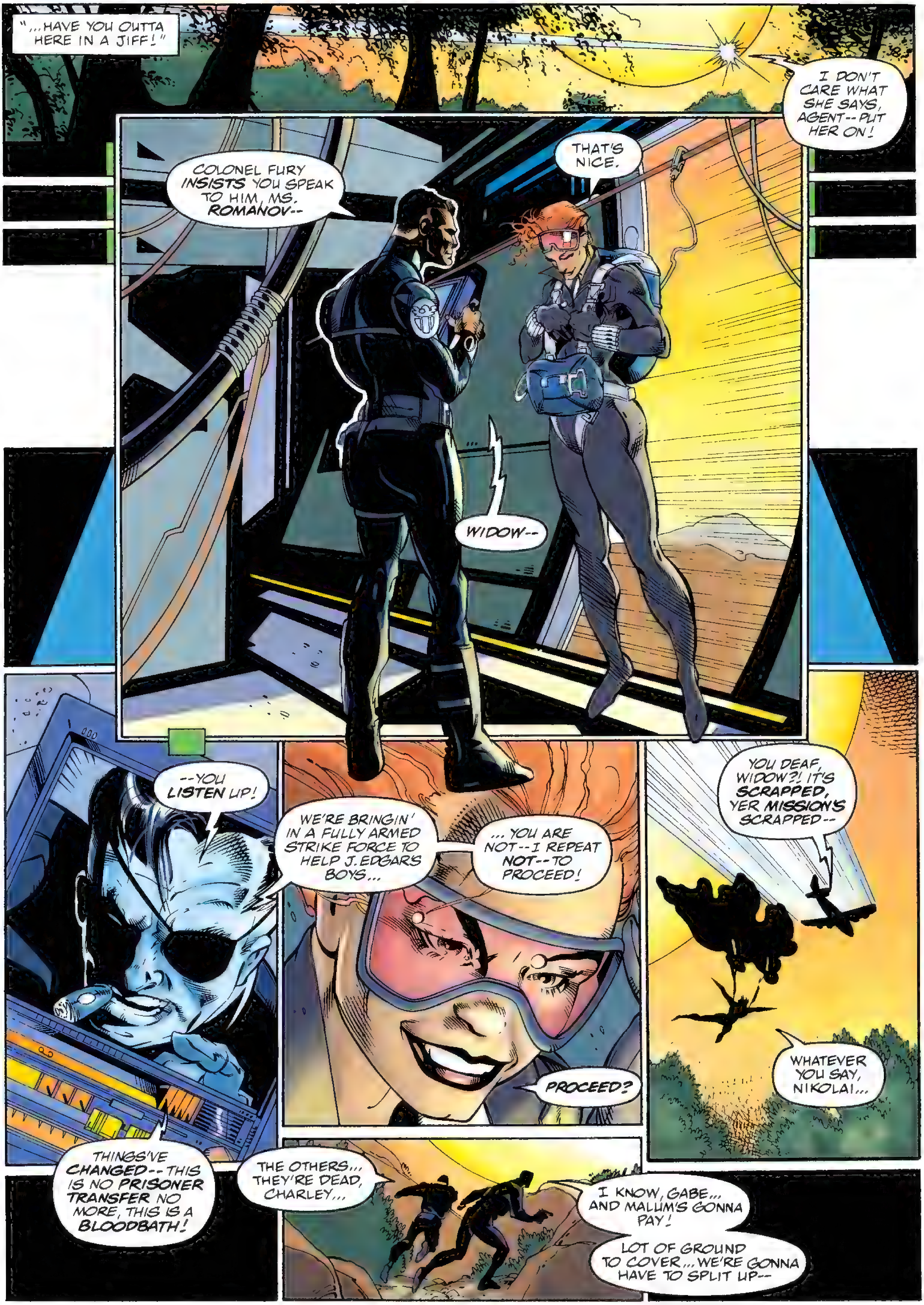
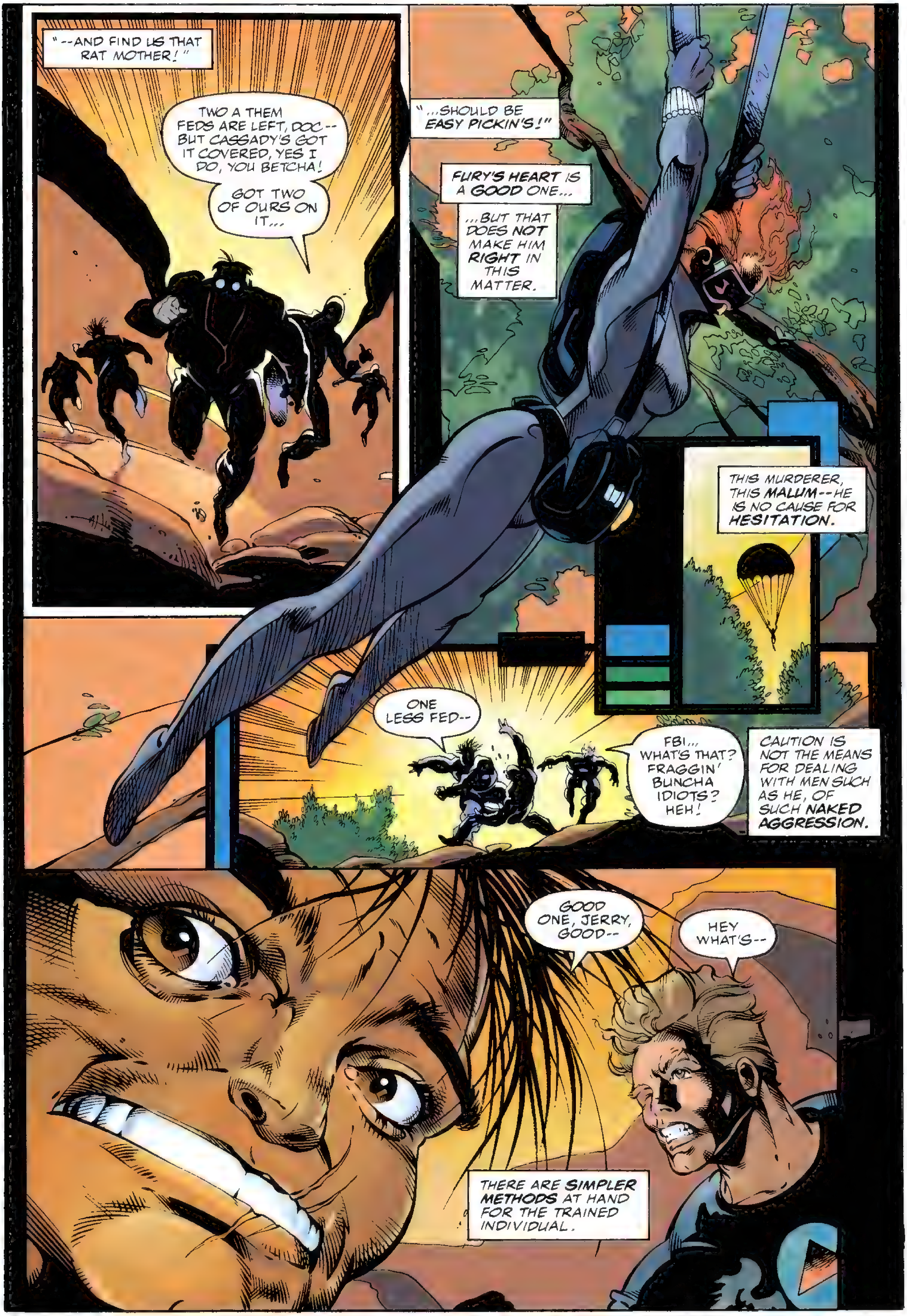
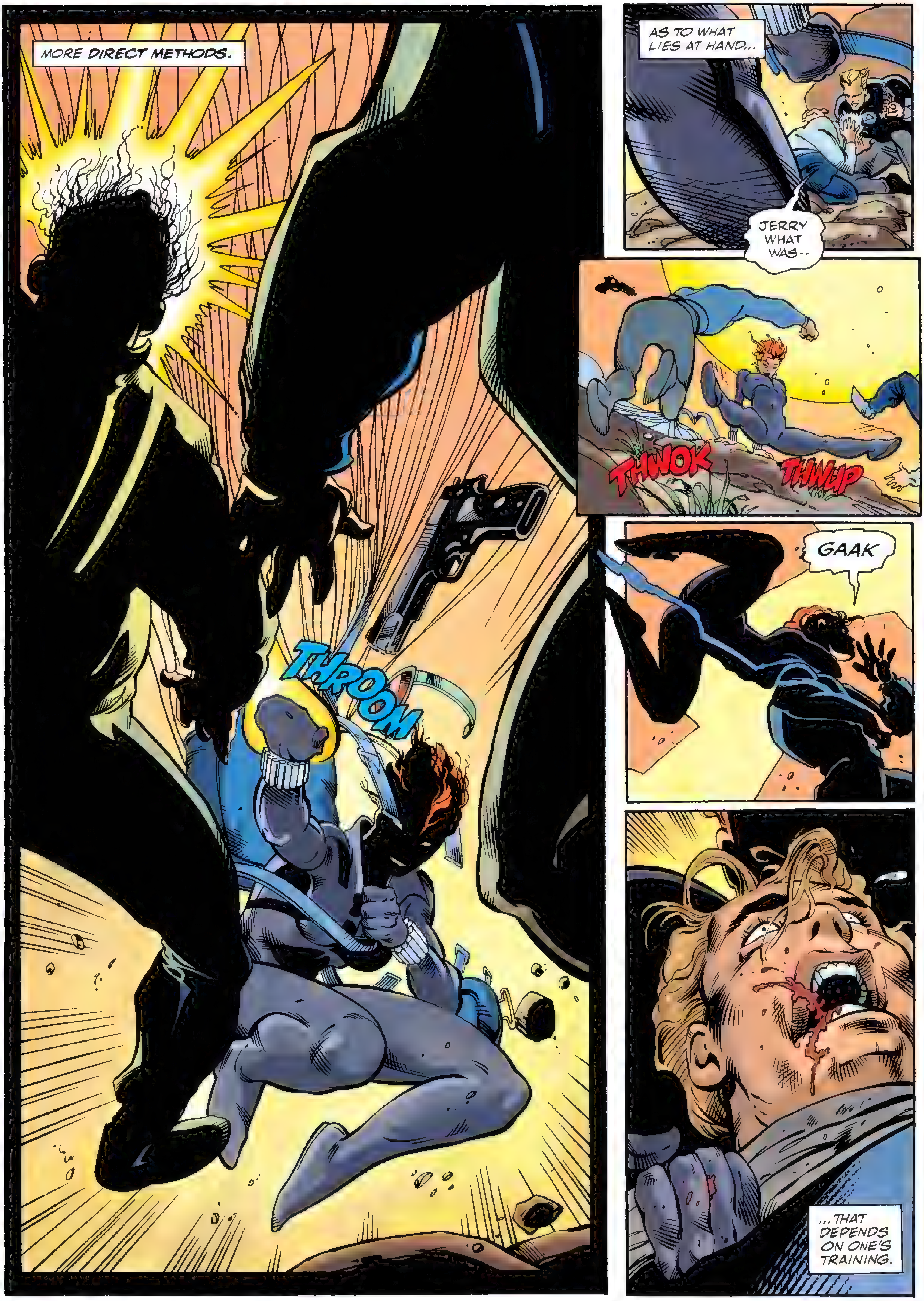
Gregory Wright,
Suzanne Dell'orto and
John Lewandowski

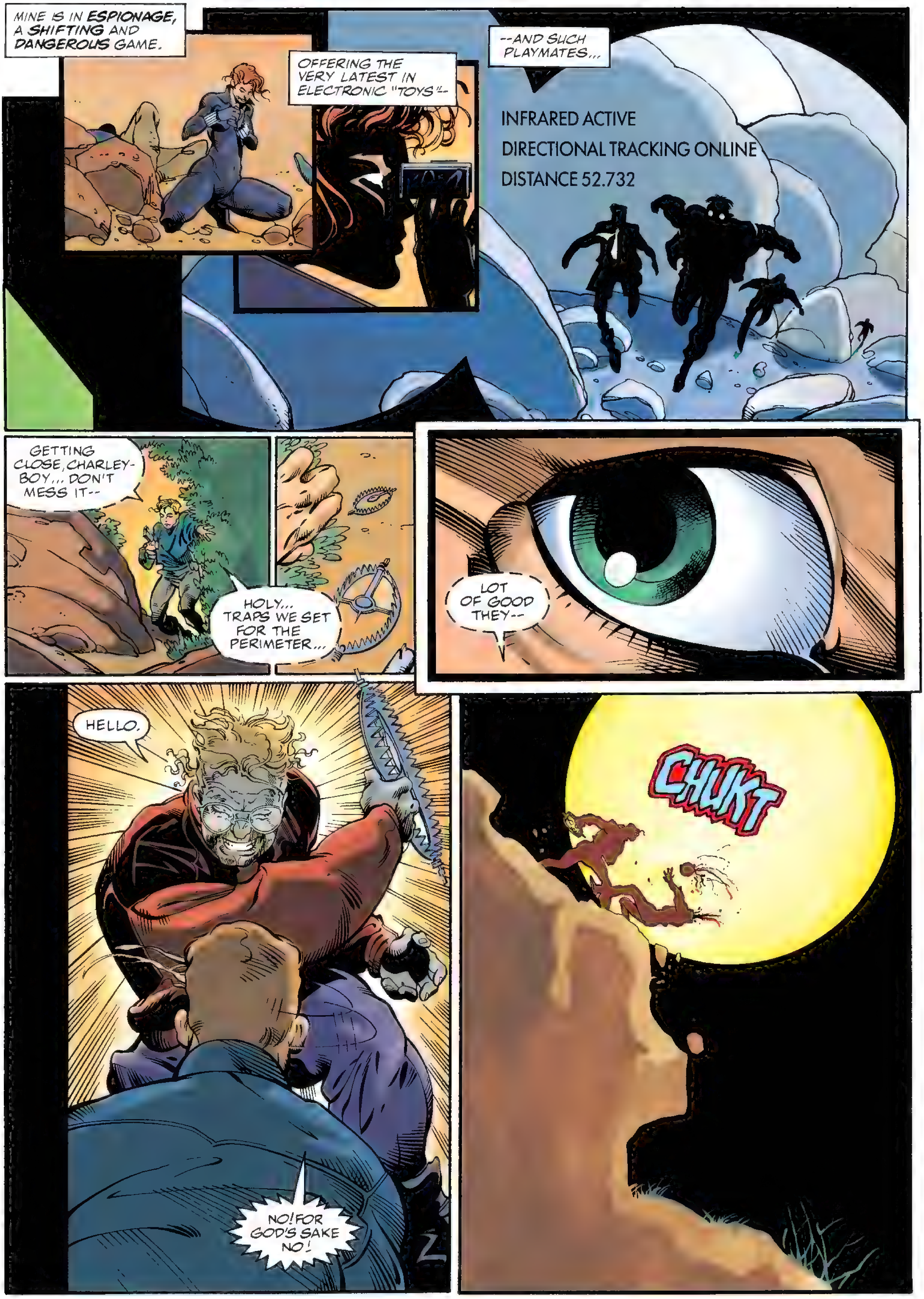

KRTOW
KRKOW
THEY'RE MOVING AROUND FRONT! KENNY, LOOK OUT!
KROOM
KRTOOM
KENNY! OH JESUS, HE'S HIT!
CHARGED IN A SERIES OF BRUTAL MURDERS, PETER MALUM ESCAPED CUSTODY IN EARLY 1972...
RECENTLY APPREHENDED BY AGENTS OF THE F.B.I., MALUM NOW FACES TRIAL AND WHAT AUTHORITIES ARE CALLING "LONG OVERDUE JUSTICE--"
PE TV
KTING
KTANG
KENNY'S HIT!
PTOOM
KRRZZKAAM
RELOAD NOW WHILE THEY'RE--
SONS OF--
BACK-UP, DAMN IT, WE NEED BACK-UP! DO YOU READ ME?!? IT'S GOTTEN OUT OF CONTROL, IT'S GOTTEN--
EEAARR

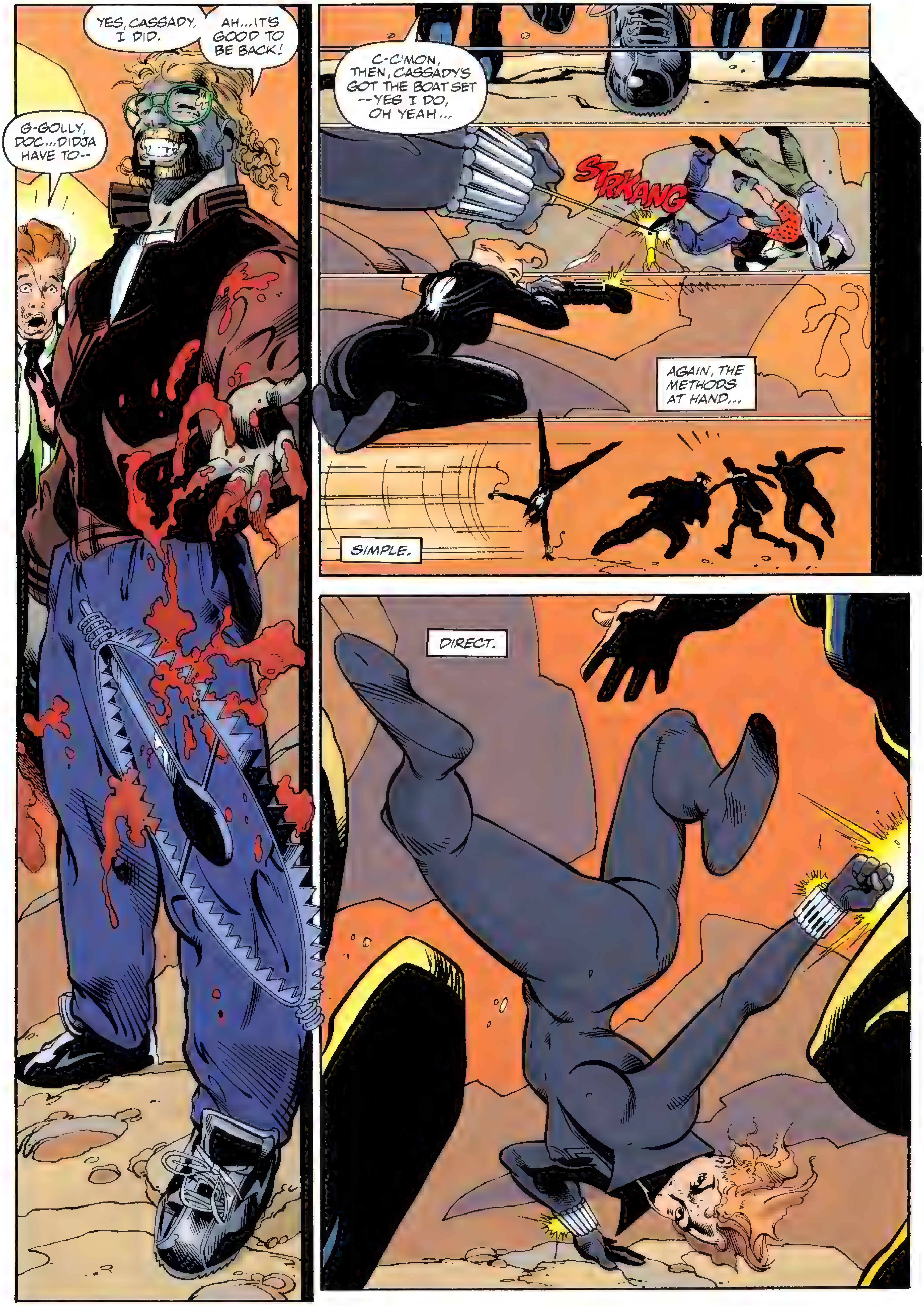

KTING
FRONT WINDOW, CHARLEY!
GOT 'EM, GABE, GOT--
KTAAM
WHAT'S THIS ABOUT, YOU S.O.B.?!
WHAT DO THEY WANT YOU FOR?!
PLUTO.
FORGET HIM, NELSON! THEY'RE CLOSIN' IN, THEY'RE--
THRKOO-OM
HOW DO, DOC MALUM?
TOLD YA CASSADY WOULDN'T LET YOU DOWN, NOT ME, NO SIR...

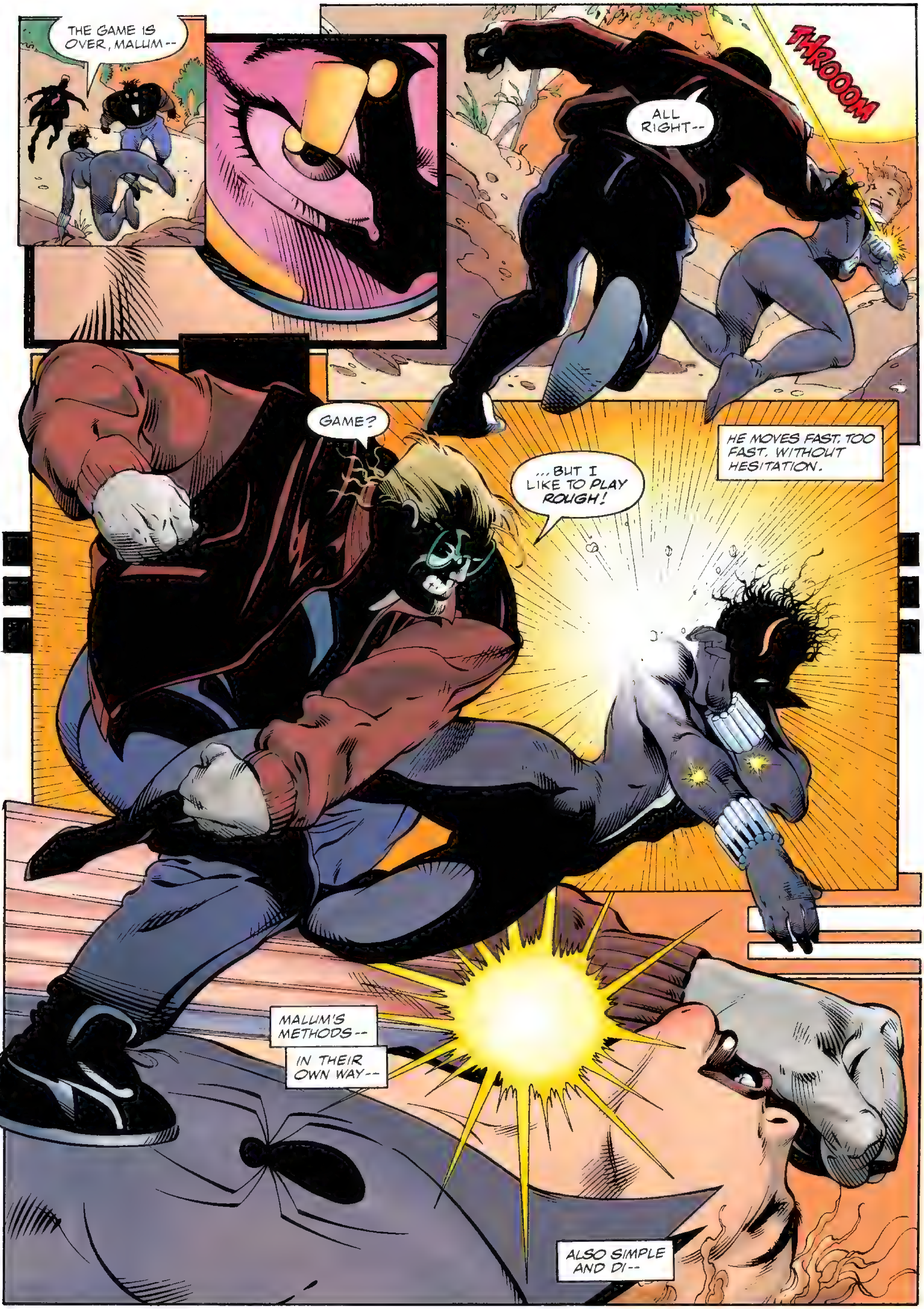

"...HAVE YOU OUTTA HERE IN A JIFF!"
I DON'T CARE WHAT SHE SAYS, AGENT--PUT HER ON!
COLONEL FURY INSISTS YOU SPEAK TO HIM, MS. ROMANOV--
THAT'S NICE.
WIDOW--
--YOU LISTEN UP!
WE'RE BRINGIN' IN A FULLY ARMED STRIKE FORCE TO HELP J. EDGAR'S BOYS...
...YOU ARE NOT--I REPEAT NOT--TO PROCEED!
PROCEED?
YOU DEAF, WIDOW?! IT'S SCRAPPED, YER MISSION'S SCRAPPED--
WHATEVER YOU SAY, NIKOLAI...
THINGS'VE CHANGED--THIS IS NO PRISONER TRANSFER NO MORE, THIS IS A BLOODBATH!
THE OTHERS... THEY'RE DEAD, CHARLEY...
I KNOW, GABE... AND MALUM'S GONNA PAY!
LOT OF GROUND TO COVER... WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO SPLIT UP--

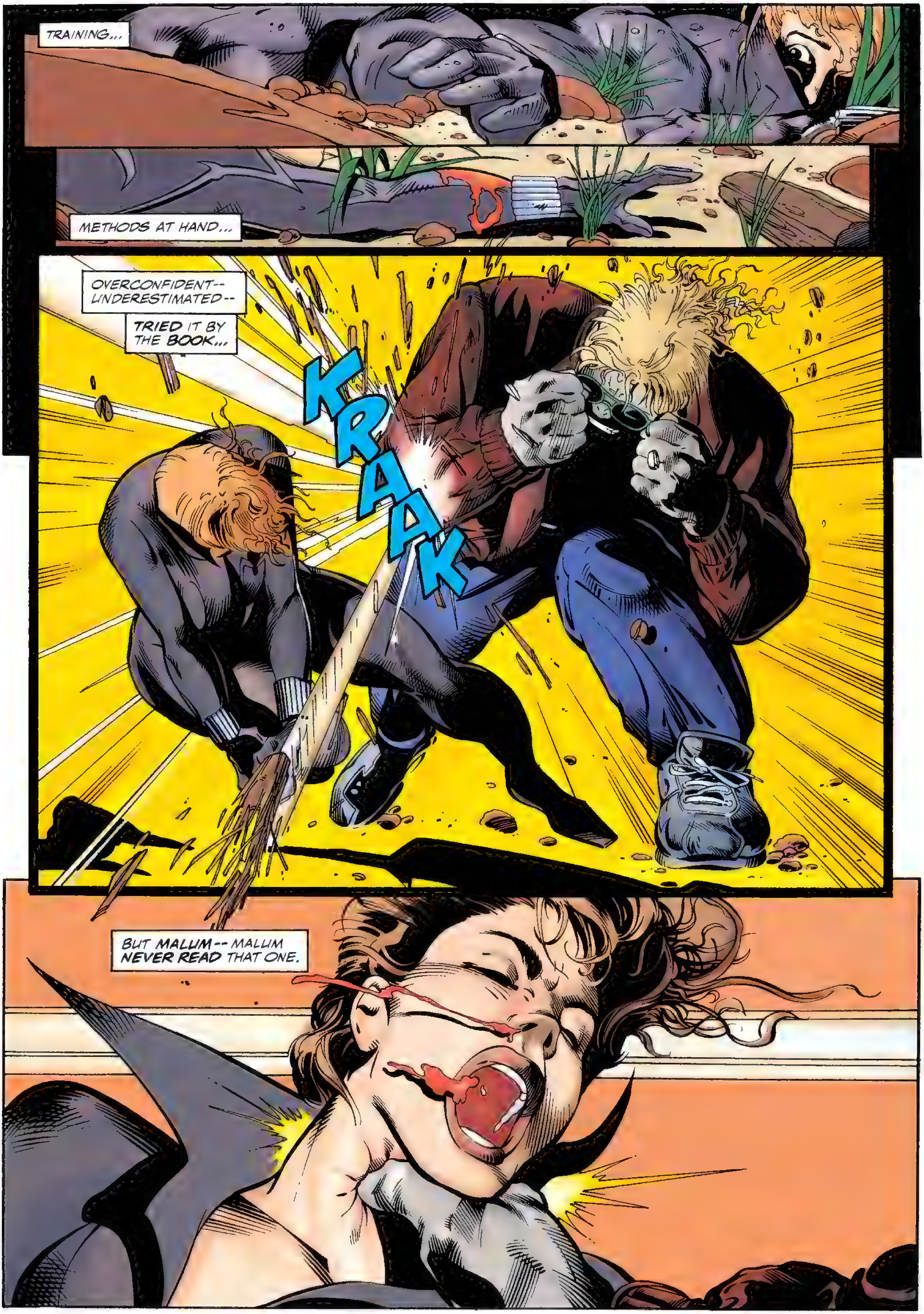

"--AND FIND US THAT RAT MOTHER!"
TWO A THEM FEDS ARE LEFT, DOC-- BUT CASSADY'S GOT IT COVERED, YES I DO, YOU BETCHA!
GOT TWO OF OURS ON IT...
"...SHOULD BE **EASY PICKIN'S!**"
FURY'S HEART IS A **GOOD** ONE...
...BUT THAT DOES **NOT** MAKE HIM **RIGHT** IN THIS MATTER.
THIS MURDERER, THIS **MALUM**--HE IS NO CAUSE FOR **HESITATION.**
ONE LESS FED--
FBI... WHAT'S THAT? FRAGGIN' BUNCHA IDIOTS? HEH!
CAUTION IS NOT THE MEANS FOR DEALING WITH MEN SUCH AS HE, OF SUCH **NAKED AGGRESSION.**
GOOD ONE, JERRY, GOOD--
HEY WHAT'S--
THERE ARE **SIMPLER METHODS** AT HAND FOR THE TRAINED INDIVIDUAL.

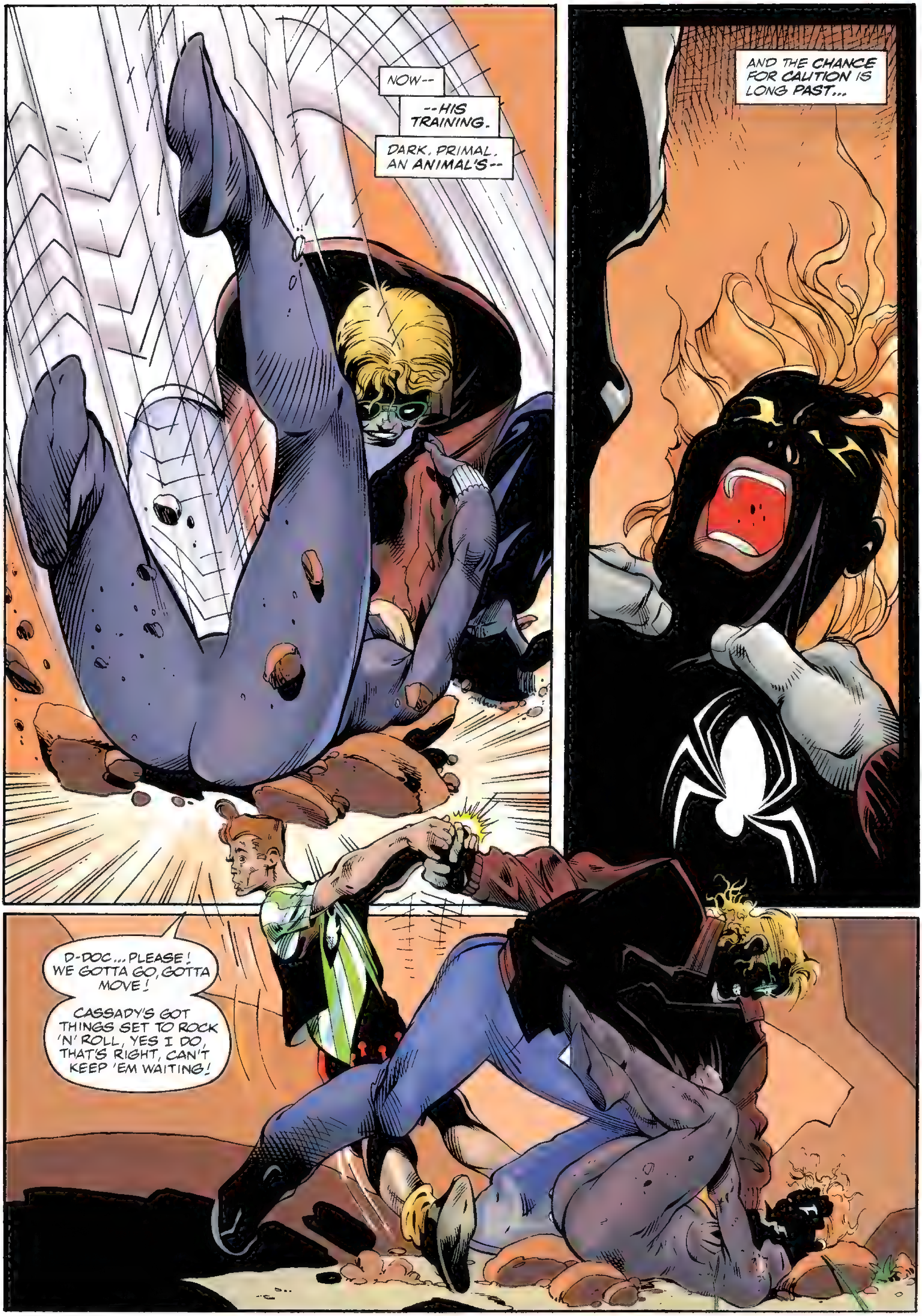

MORE DIRECT METHODS.
THROOM
AS TO WHAT LIES AT HAND...
JERRY WHAT WAS--
THWOK
THWUP
GAAK
...THAT DEPENDS ON ONE'S TRAINING.

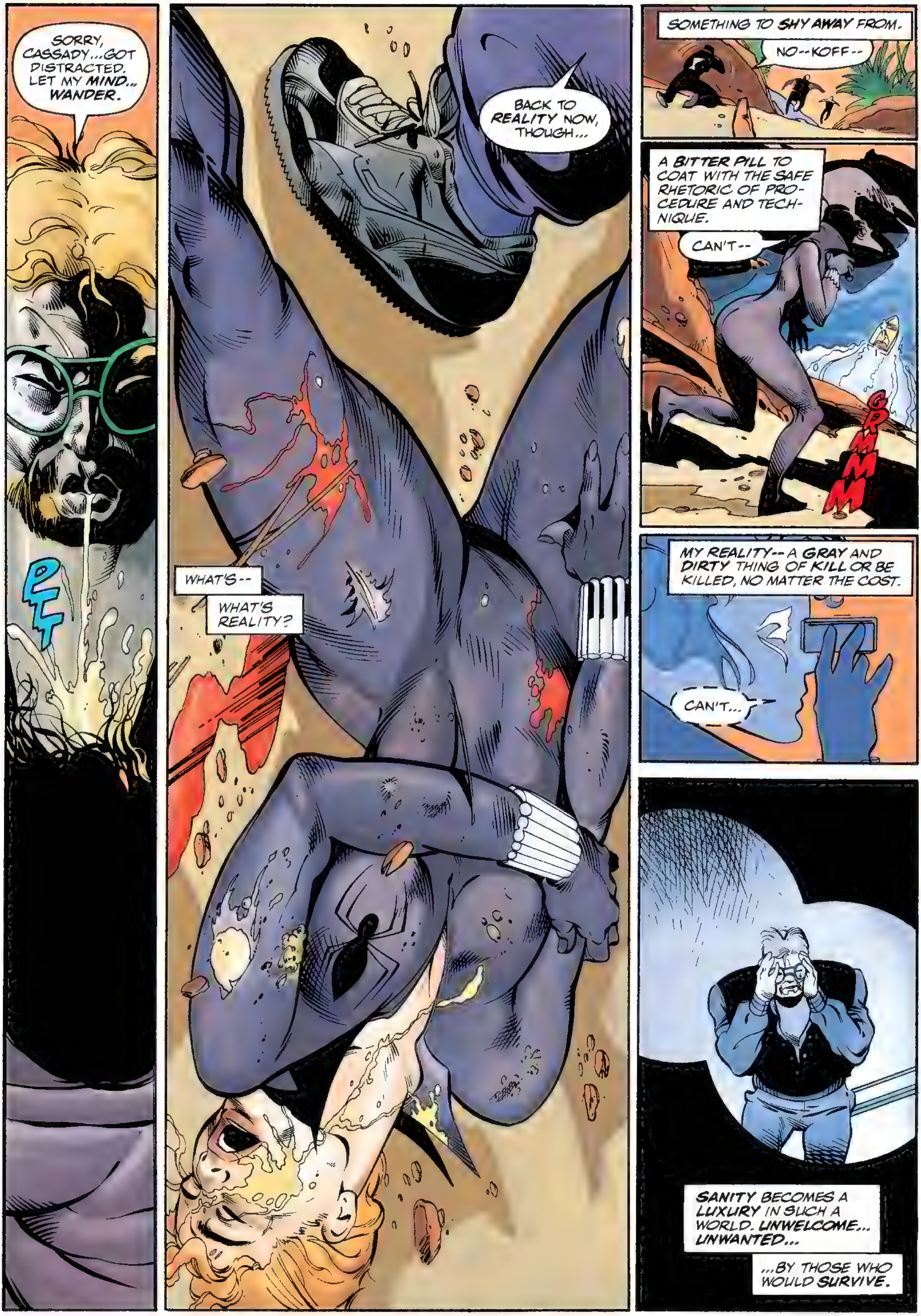

MINE IS IN ESPIONAGE, A SHIFTING AND DANGEROUS GAME.
OFFERING THE VERY LATEST IN ELECTRONIC "TOYS"--
--AND SUCH PLAYMATES...
INFRARED ACTIVE
DIRECTIONAL TRACKING ONLINE
DISTANCE 52.732
GETTING CLOSE, CHARLEY-BOY... DON'T MESS IT--
HOLY... TRAPS WE SET FOR THE PERIMETER...
LOT OF GOOD THEY--
HELLO.
NO! FOR GOD'S SAKE NO!
CHUKT

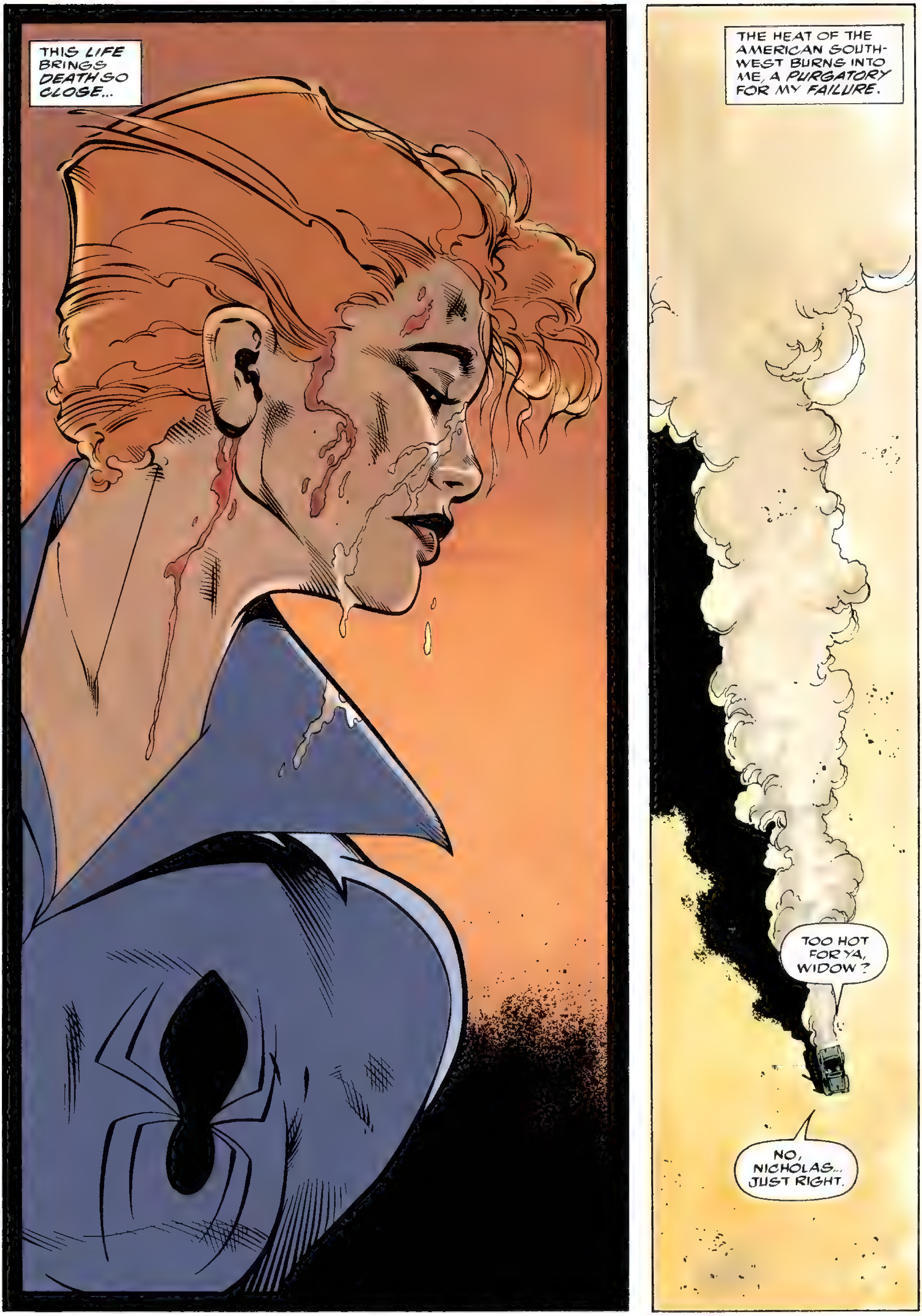

G-GOLLY, DOC...DIDJA HAVE TO--
YES, CASSADY, I DID.
AH...IT'S GOOD TO BE BACK!
C-C'MON, THEN, CASSADY'S GOT THE BOAT SET --YES I DO, OH YEAH...
STRKANG
AGAIN, THE METHODS AT HAND...
SIMPLE.
DIRECT.

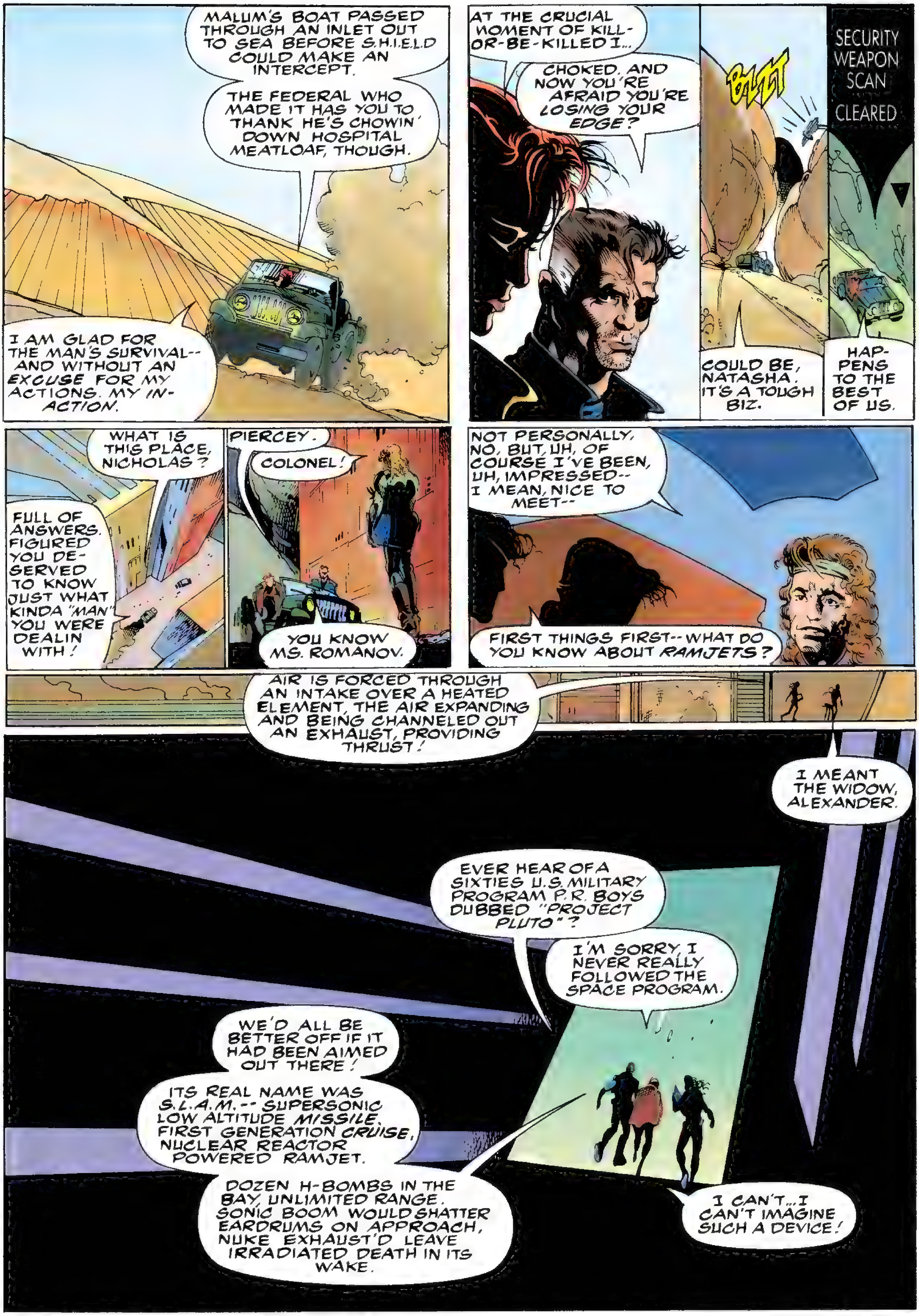

THE GAME IS OVER, MALUM--
THROOOM
ALL RIGHT--
GAME?
...BUT I LIKE TO PLAY ROUGH!
HE MOVES FAST. TOO FAST. WITHOUT HESITATION.
MALUM'S METHODS--
IN THEIR OWN WAY--
ALSO SIMPLE AND DI--

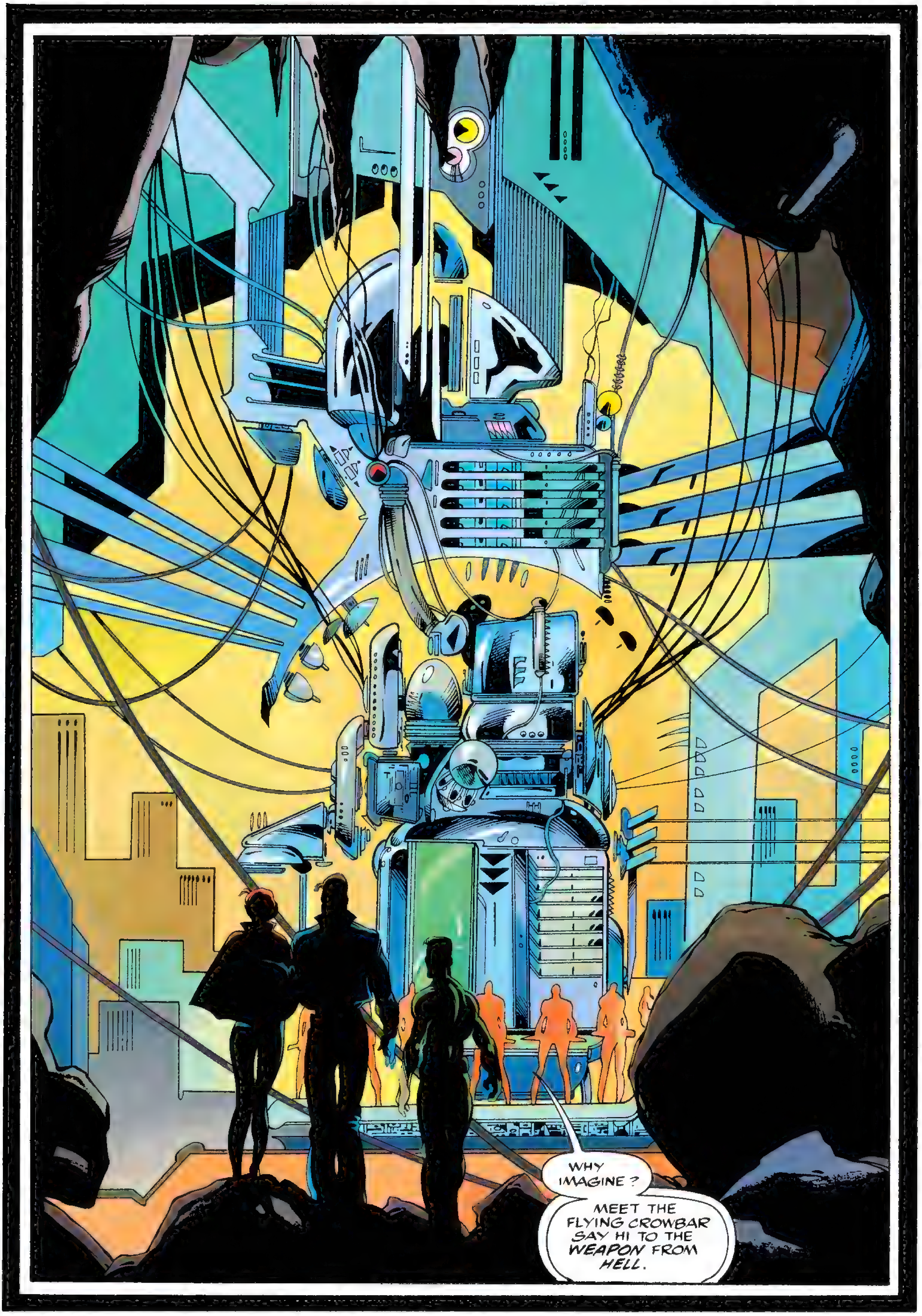

TRAINING...
METHODS AT HAND...
OVERCONFIDENT-- UNDERESTIMATED--
TRIED IT BY THE BOOK...
KRAAK
BUT MALUM--MALUM NEVER READ THAT ONE.

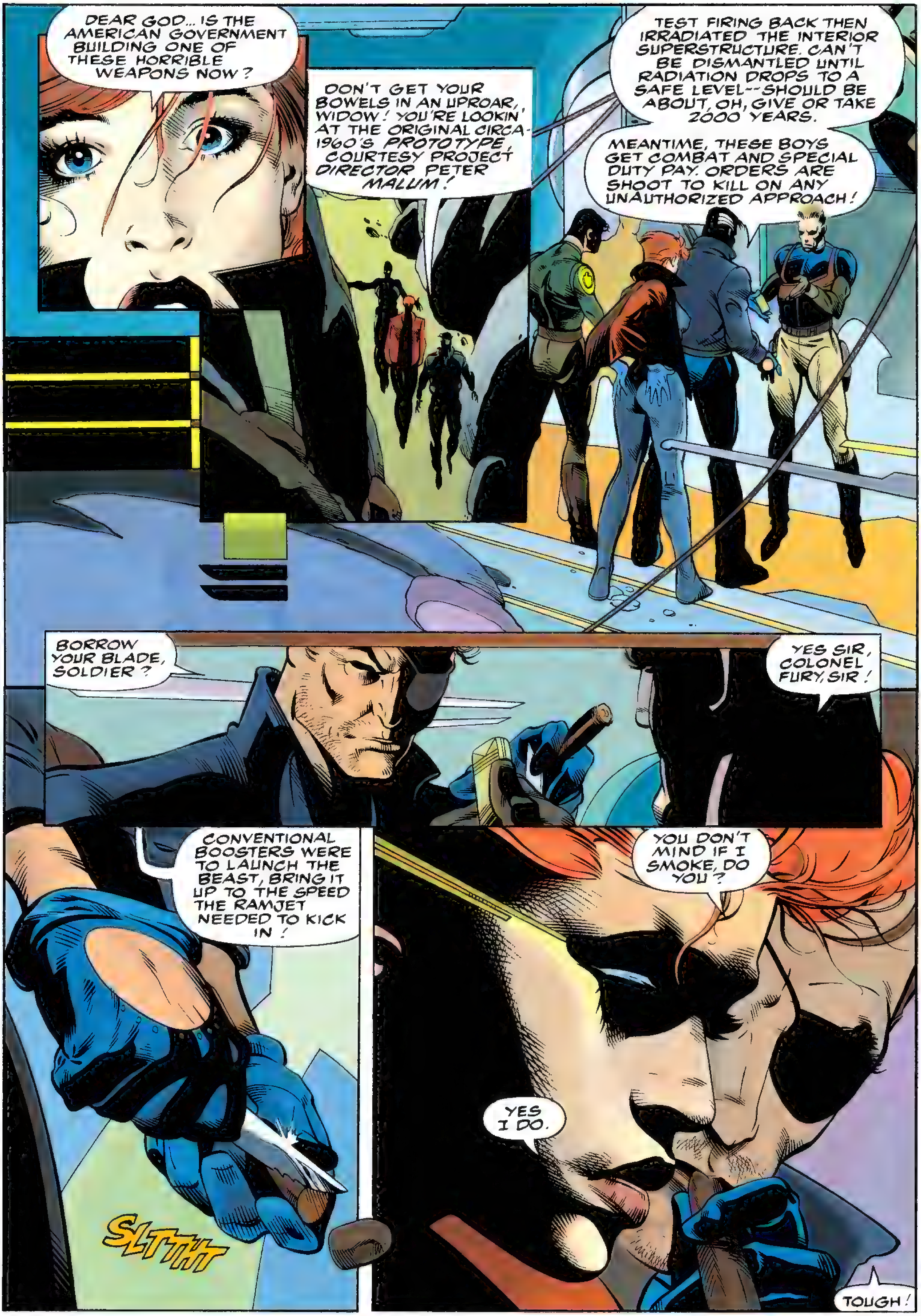

NOW--
--HIS TRAINING.
DARK. PRIMAL. AN ANIMAL'S--
AND THE CHANCE FOR CAUTION IS LONG PAST...
D-DOC... PLEASE! WE GOTTA GO, GOTTA MOVE!
CASSADY'S GOT THINGS SET TO ROCK 'N' ROLL, YES I DO, THAT'S RIGHT, CAN'T KEEP 'EM WAITING!

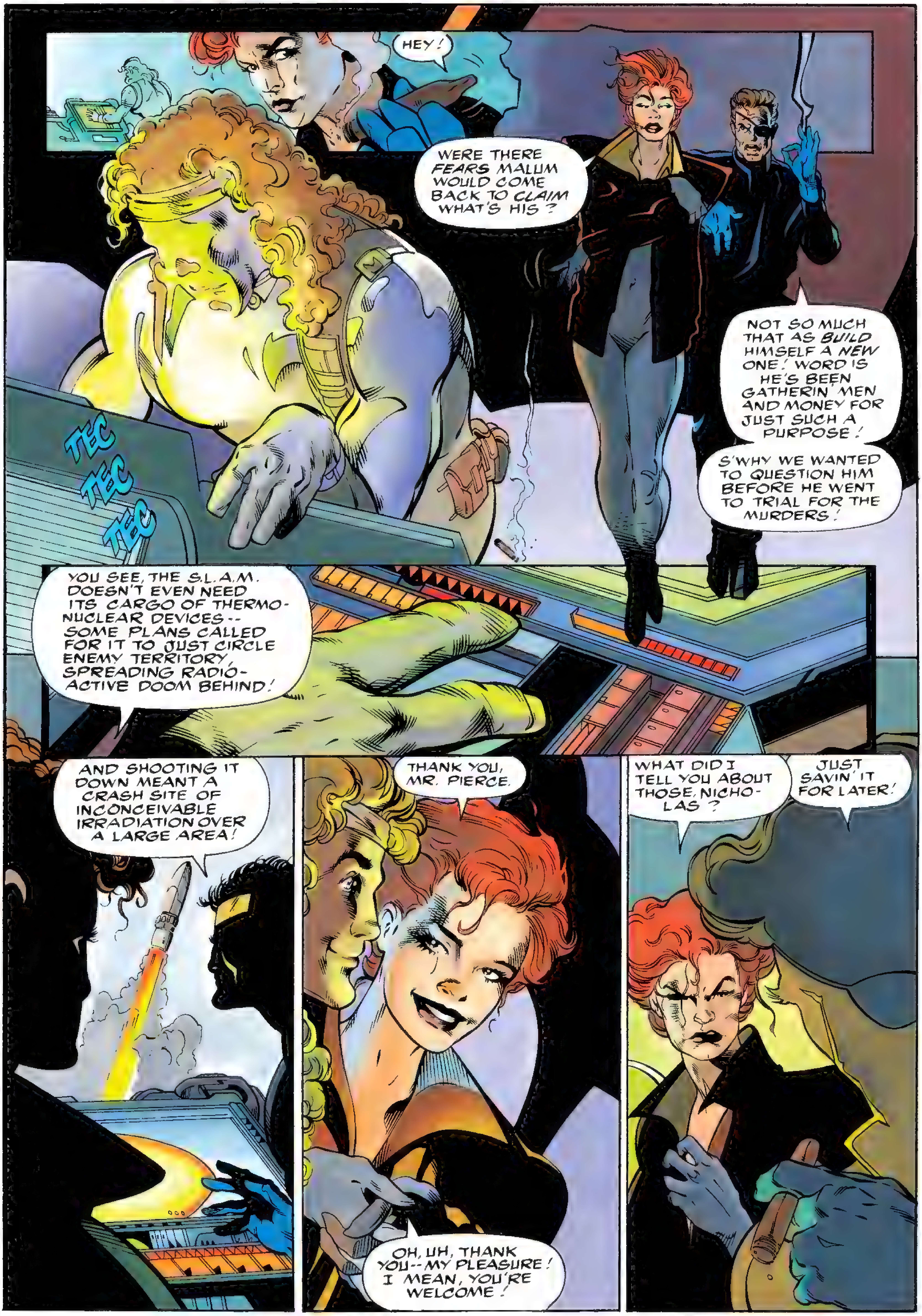

SORRY, CASSADY...GOT DISTRACTED. LET MY MIND... WANDER.
PTT
BACK TO REALITY NOW, THOUGH...
WHAT'S--
WHAT'S REALITY?
SOMETHING TO SHY AWAY FROM.
NO--KOFF--
A BITTER PILL TO COAT WITH THE SAFE RHETORIC OF PROCEDURE AND TECHNIQUE.
CAN'T--
GRMMM
MY REALITY--A GRAY AND DIRTY THING OF KILL OR BE KILLED, NO MATTER THE COST.
CAN'T...
SANITY BECOMES A LUXURY IN SUCH A WORLD. UNWELCOME... UNWANTED...
...BY THOSE WHO WOULD SURVIVE.

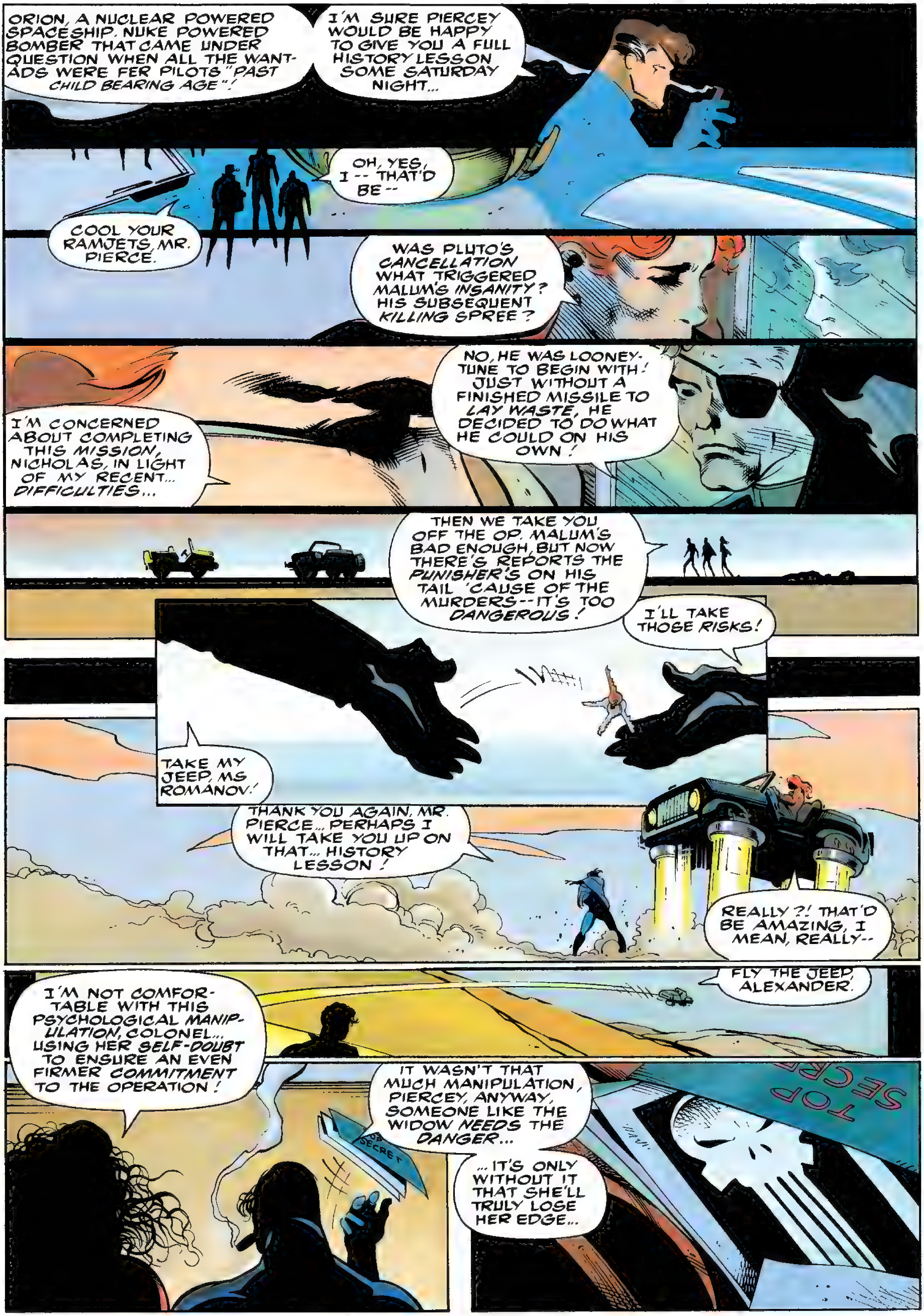

THIS *LIFE* BRINGS *DEATH* SO *CLOSE*...
THE HEAT OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH-WEST BURNS INTO ME, A *PURGATORY* FOR MY *FAILURE*.
TOO HOT FOR YA, WIDOW?
NO, NICHOLAS... JUST RIGHT.

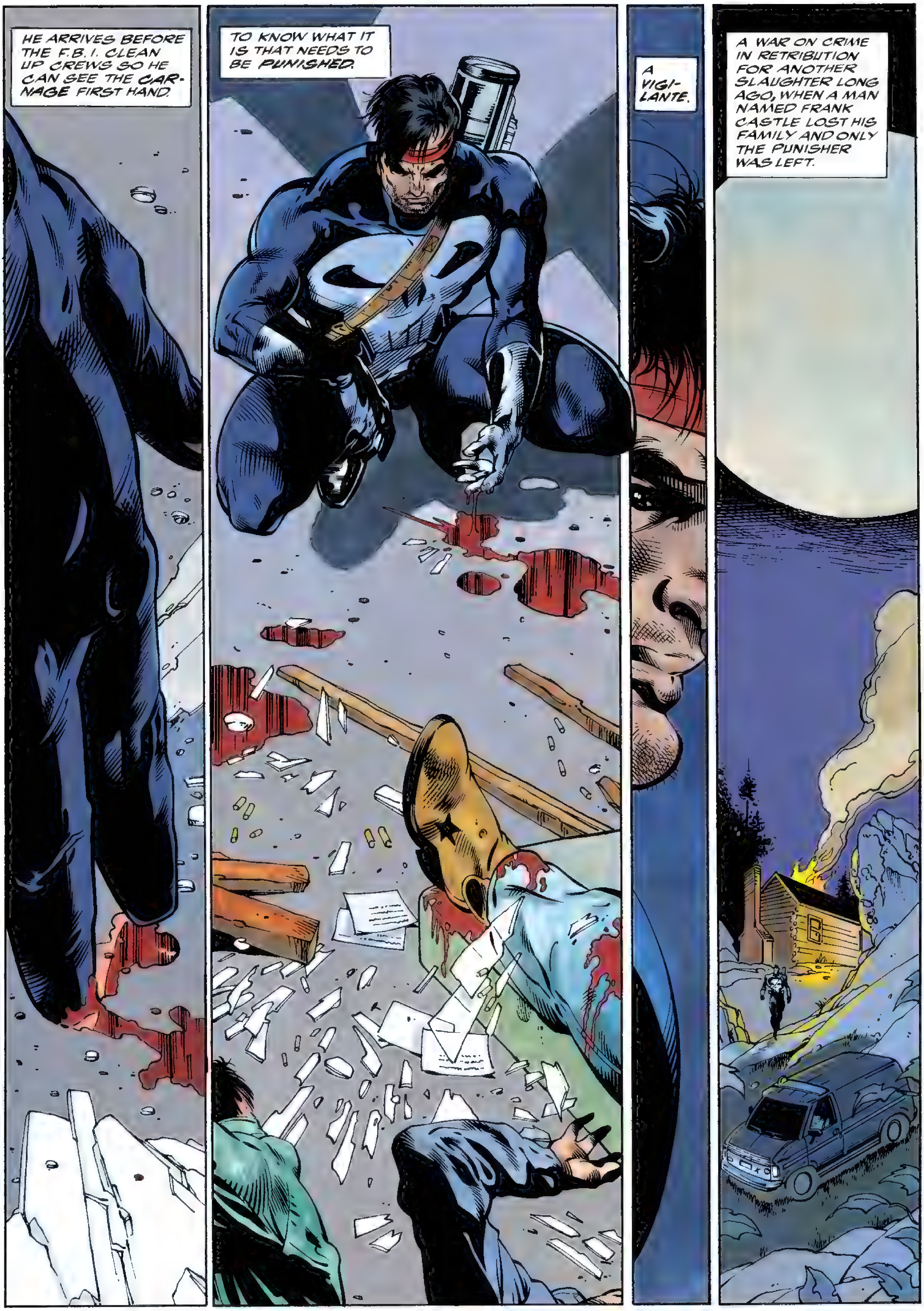

MALUM'S BOAT PASSED THROUGH AN INLET OUT TO SEA BEFORE S.H.I.E.L.D COULD MAKE AN INTERCEPT.
THE FEDERAL WHO MADE IT HAS YOU TO THANK HE'S CHOWIN' DOWN HOSPITAL MEATLOAF, THOUGH.
I AM GLAD FOR THE MAN'S SURVIVAL-- AND WITHOUT AN *EXCUSE* FOR MY ACTIONS. MY INACTION.
AT THE CRUCIAL MOMENT OF KILL-OR-BE-KILLED I...
CHOKED. AND NOW YOU'RE AFRAID YOU'RE LOSING YOUR EDGE?
BZZT
SECURITY WEAPON SCAN CLEARED
COULD BE, NATASHA. IT'S A TOUGH BIZ.
HAPPENS TO THE BEST OF US.
WHAT IS THIS PLACE, NICHOLAS?
FULL OF ANSWERS. FIGURED YOU DESERVED TO KNOW JUST WHAT KINDA "MAN" YOU WERE DEALIN WITH!
PIERCEY.
COLONEL!
YOU KNOW MS. ROMANOV.
NOT PERSONALLY, NO, BUT, UH, OF COURSE I'VE BEEN, UH, IMPRESSED-- I MEAN, NICE TO MEET--
FIRST THINGS FIRST--WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT *RAMJETS*?
AIR IS FORCED THROUGH AN INTAKE OVER A HEATED ELEMENT, THE AIR EXPANDING AND BEING CHANNELED OUT AN EXHAUST, PROVIDING THRUST!
I MEANT THE WIDOW, ALEXANDER.
EVER HEAR OF A SIXTIES U.S. MILITARY PROGRAM P.R. BOYS DUBBED "PROJECT PLUTO"?
I'M SORRY, I NEVER REALLY FOLLOWED THE SPACE PROGRAM.
WE'D ALL BE BETTER OFF IF IT HAD BEEN AIMED OUT THERE!
ITS REAL NAME WAS S.L.A.M.-- SUPERSONIC LOW ALTITUDE *MISSILE*. FIRST GENERATION *CRUISE*, NUCLEAR REACTOR POWERED RAMJET.
DOZEN H-BOMBS IN THE BAY, UNLIMITED RANGE. SONIC BOOM WOULD SHATTER EARDRUMS ON APPROACH, NUKE EXHAUST'D LEAVE IRRADIATED DEATH IN ITS WAKE.
I CAN'T...I CAN'T IMAGINE SUCH A DEVICE!

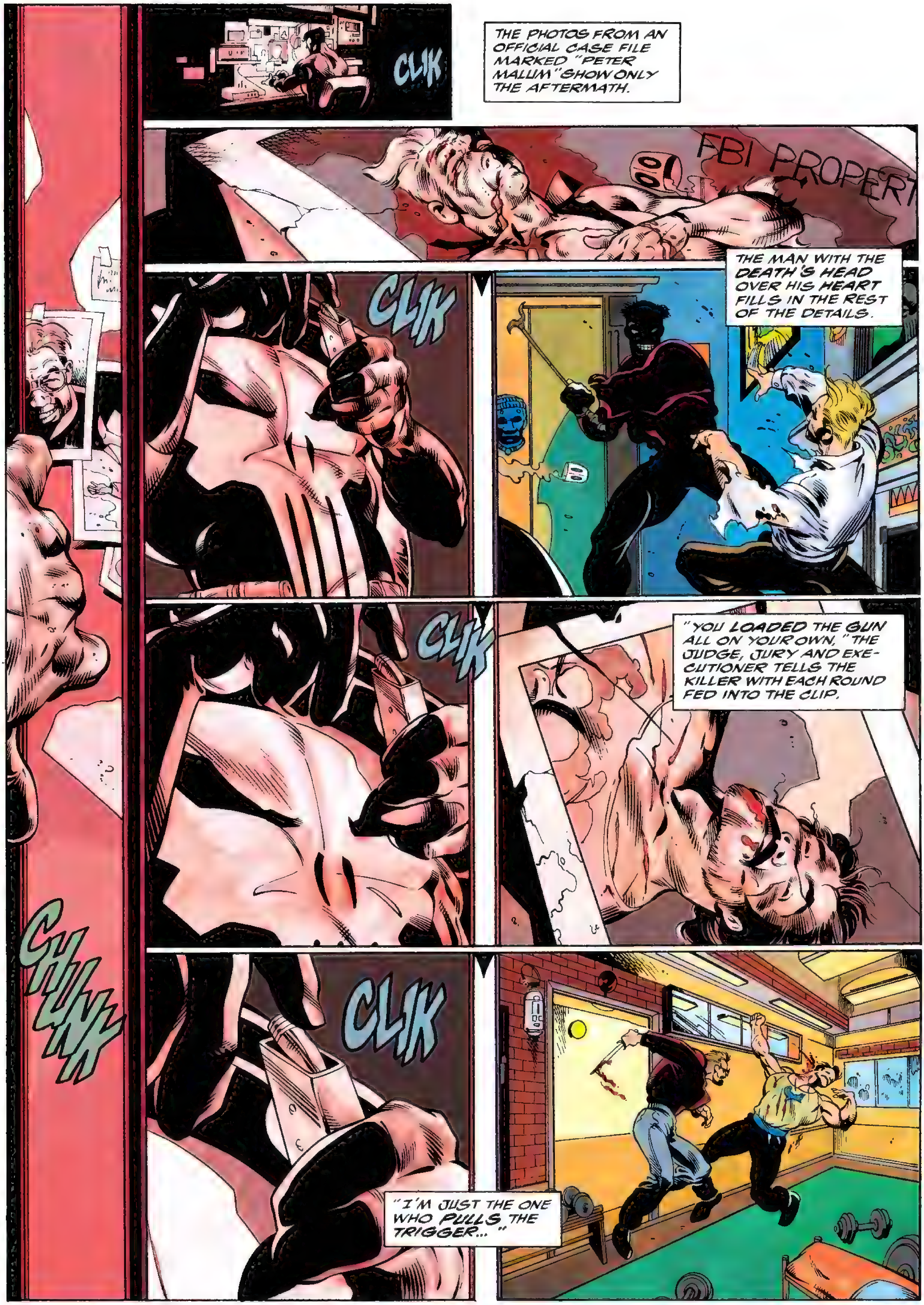

WHY IMAGINE?
MEET THE FLYING CROWBAR SAY HI TO THE *WEAPON* FROM *HELL*.

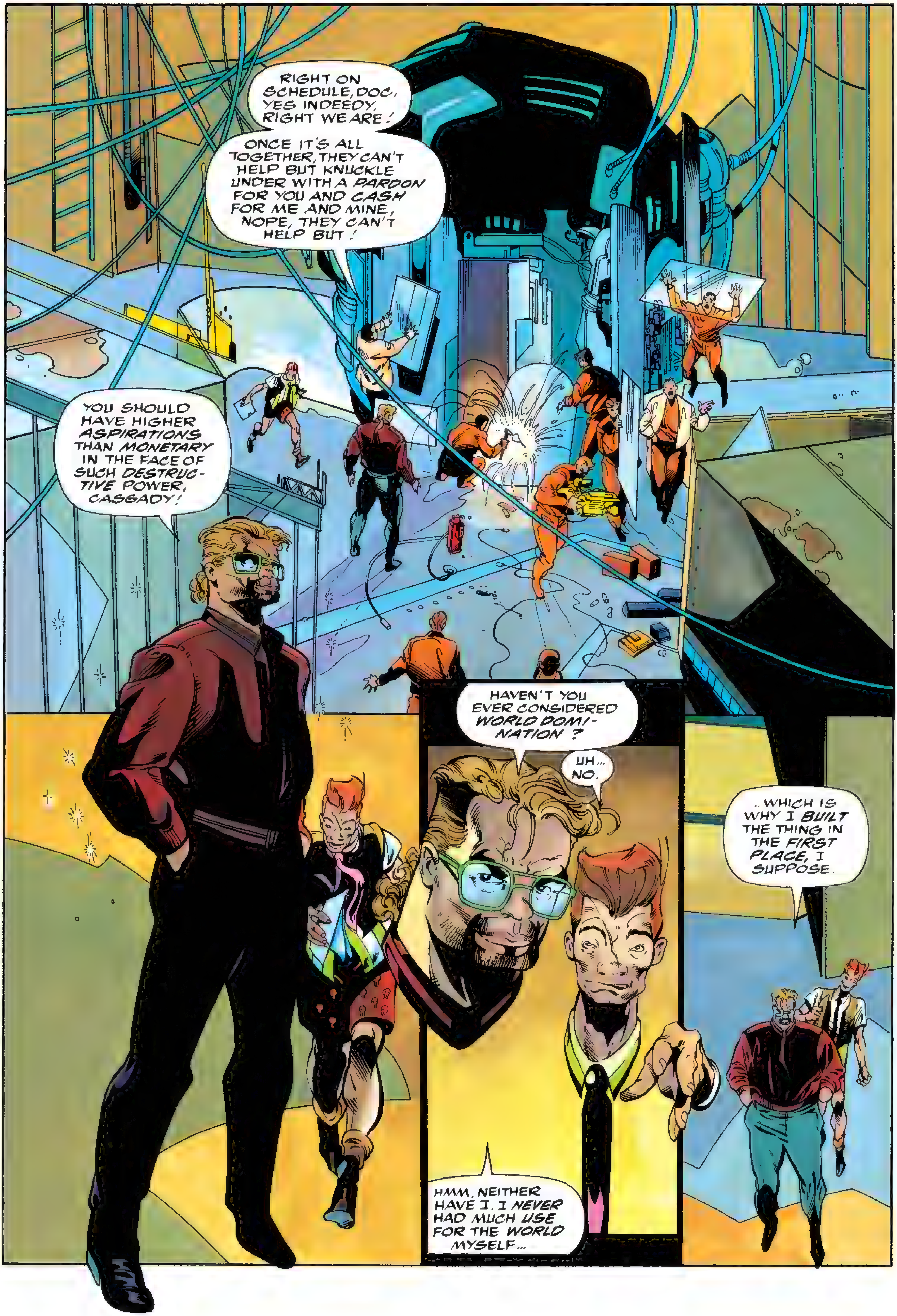

DEAR GOD... IS THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT BUILDING ONE OF THESE HORRIBLE WEAPONS NOW?
DON'T GET YOUR BOWELS IN AN UPROAR, WIDOW! YOU'RE LOOKIN' AT THE ORIGINAL CIRCA-1960'S PROTOTYPE, COURTESY PROJECT DIRECTOR PETER MALUM!
TEST FIRING BACK THEN IRRADIATED THE INTERIOR SUPERSTRUCTURE. CAN'T BE DISMANTLED UNTIL RADIATION DROPS TO A SAFE LEVEL--SHOULD BE ABOUT, OH, GIVE OR TAKE 2000 YEARS.
MEANTIME, THESE BOYS GET COMBAT AND SPECIAL DUTY PAY. ORDERS ARE SHOOT TO KILL ON ANY UNAUTHORIZED APPROACH!
BORROW YOUR BLADE, SOLDIER?
YES SIR, COLONEL FURY, SIR!
CONVENTIONAL BOOSTERS WERE TO LAUNCH THE BEAST, BRING IT UP TO THE SPEED THE RAMJET NEEDED TO KICK IN!
SLTTHT
YOU DON'T MIND IF I SMOKE, DO YOU?
YES I DO.
TOUGH!

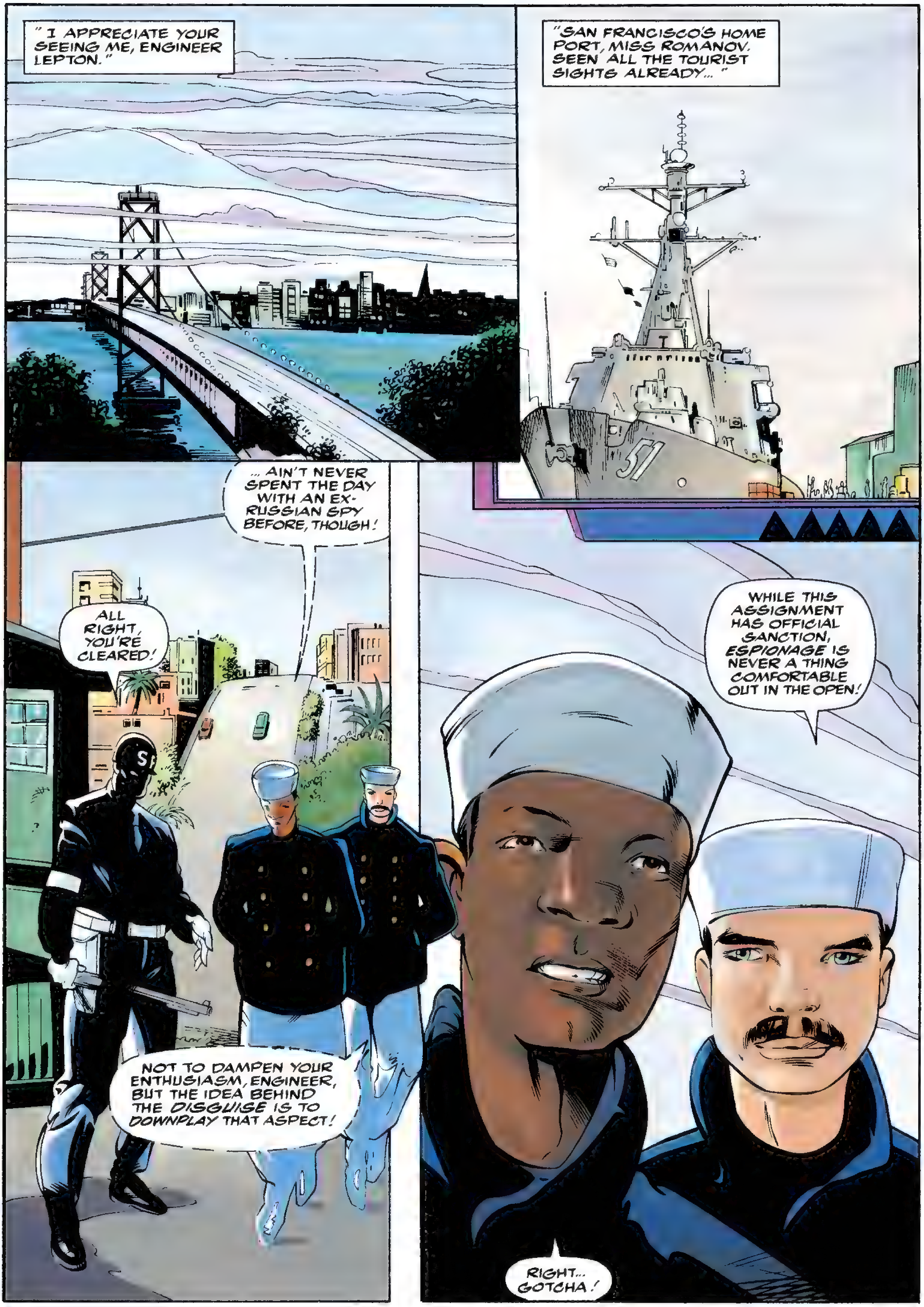

HEY!
WERE THERE FEARS MALUM WOULD COME BACK TO CLAIM WHAT'S HIS?
NOT SO MUCH THAT AS BUILD HIMSELF A NEW ONE! WORD IS HE'S BEEN GATHERIN' MEN AND MONEY FOR JUST SUCH A PURPOSE!
S'WHY WE WANTED TO QUESTION HIM BEFORE HE WENT TO TRIAL FOR THE MURDERS!
TEC TEC TEC
YOU SEE, THE S.L.A.M. DOESN'T EVEN NEED ITS CARGO OF THERMONUCLEAR DEVICES-- SOME PLANS CALLED FOR IT TO JUST CIRCLE ENEMY TERRITORY, SPREADING RADIOACTIVE DOOM BEHIND!
AND SHOOTING IT DOWN MEANT A CRASH SITE OF INCONCEIVABLE IRRADIATION OVER A LARGE AREA!
THANK YOU, MR. PIERCE.
OH, UH, THANK YOU-- MY PLEASURE! I MEAN, YOU'RE WELCOME!
WHAT DID I TELL YOU ABOUT THOSE, NICHOLAS?
JUST SAVIN' IT FOR LATER!

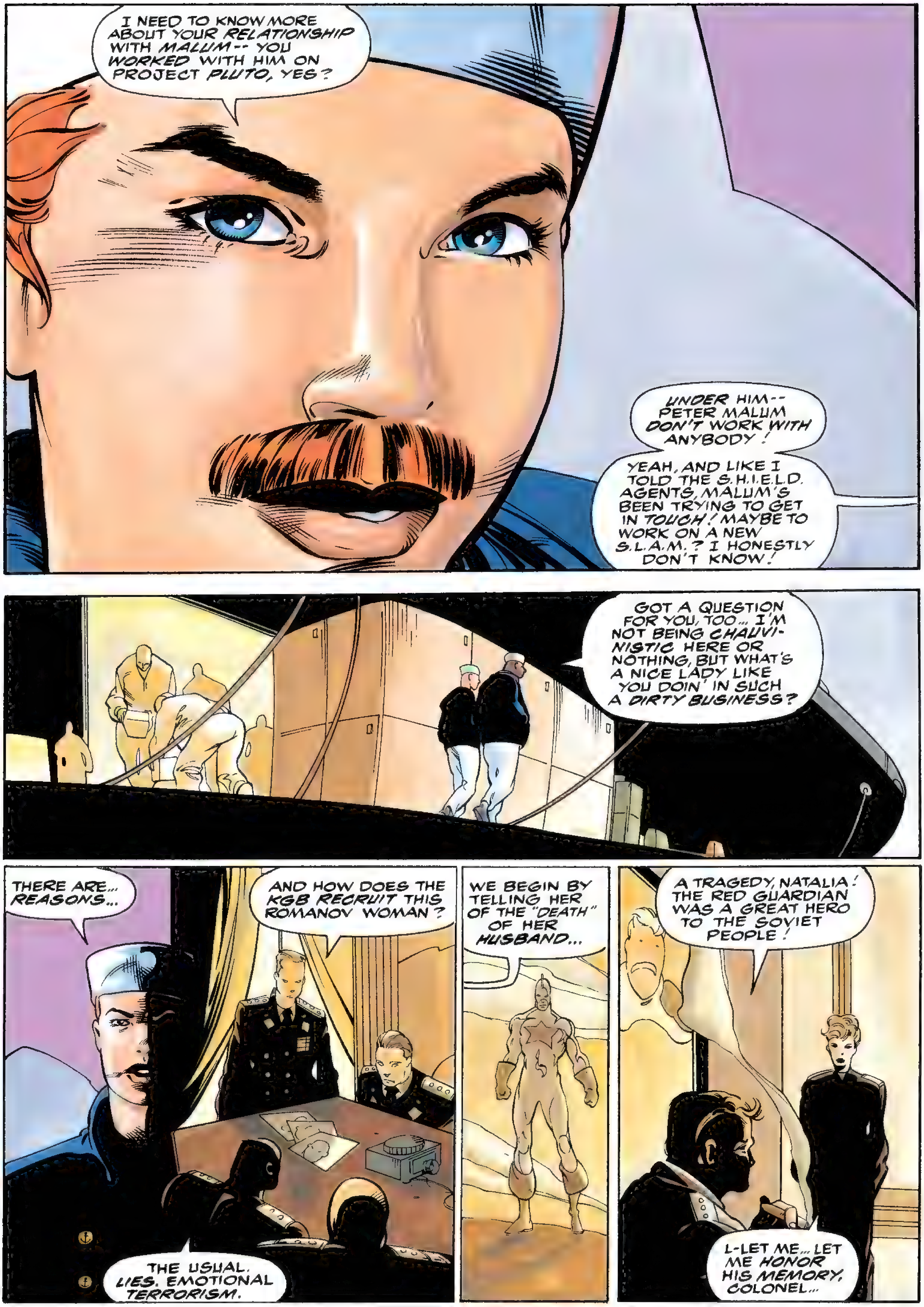

ORION, A NUCLEAR POWERED SPACESHIP. NUKE POWERED BOMBER THAT CAME UNDER QUESTION WHEN ALL THE WANT-ADS WERE FER PILOTS "PAST CHILD BEARING AGE"!
I'M SURE PIERCEY WOULD BE HAPPY TO GIVE YOU A FULL HISTORY LESSON SOME SATURDAY NIGHT...
OH, YES, I -- THAT'D BE --
COOL YOUR RAMJETS, MR. PIERCE.
WAS PLUTO'S CANCELLATION WHAT TRIGGERED MALUM'S INSANITY? HIS SUBSEQUENT KILLING SPREE?
I'M CONCERNED ABOUT COMPLETING THIS MISSION, NICHOLAS, IN LIGHT OF MY RECENT... DIFFICULTIES...
NO, HE WAS LOONEY-TUNE TO BEGIN WITH! JUST WITHOUT A FINISHED MISSILE TO LAY WASTE, HE DECIDED TO DO WHAT HE COULD ON HIS OWN!
THEN WE TAKE YOU OFF THE OP. MALUM'S BAD ENOUGH, BUT NOW THERE'S REPORTS THE PUNISHER'S ON HIS TAIL 'CAUSE OF THE MURDERS--IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!
I'LL TAKE THOSE RISKS!
TAKE MY JEEP, MS ROMANOV!
THANK YOU AGAIN, MR. PIERCE... PERHAPS I WILL TAKE YOU UP ON THAT... HISTORY LESSON!
REALLY?! THAT'D BE AMAZING, I MEAN, REALLY--
FLY THE JEEP, ALEXANDER.
I'M NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIPULATION, COLONEL... USING HER SELF-DOUBT TO ENSURE AN EVEN FIRMER COMMITMENT TO THE OPERATION!
SECRET
IT WASN'T THAT MUCH MANIPULATION, PIERCEY, ANYWAY. SOMEONE LIKE THE WIDOW NEEDS THE DANGER...
TOP SECRE
...IT'S ONLY WITHOUT IT THAT SHE'LL TRULY LOSE HER EDGE...

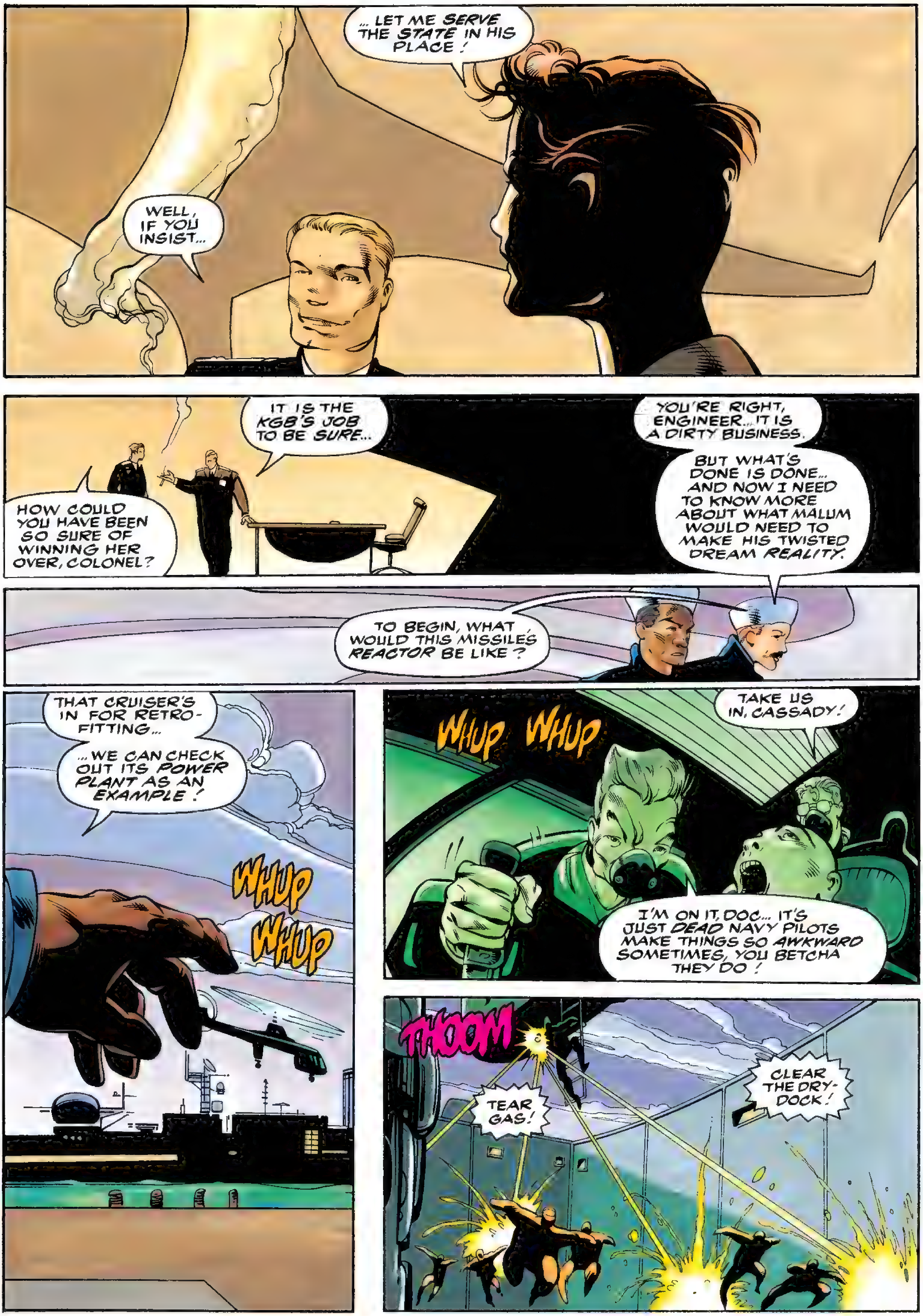

HE ARRIVES BEFORE THE F.B.I. CLEAN UP CREWS SO HE CAN SEE THE **CARNAGE** FIRST HAND.
TO KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT NEEDS TO BE **PUNISHED**.
A VIGILANTE.
A WAR ON CRIME IN RETRIBUTION FOR ANOTHER SLAUGHTER LONG AGO, WHEN A MAN NAMED FRANK CASTLE LOST HIS FAMILY AND ONLY THE PUNISHER WAS LEFT.

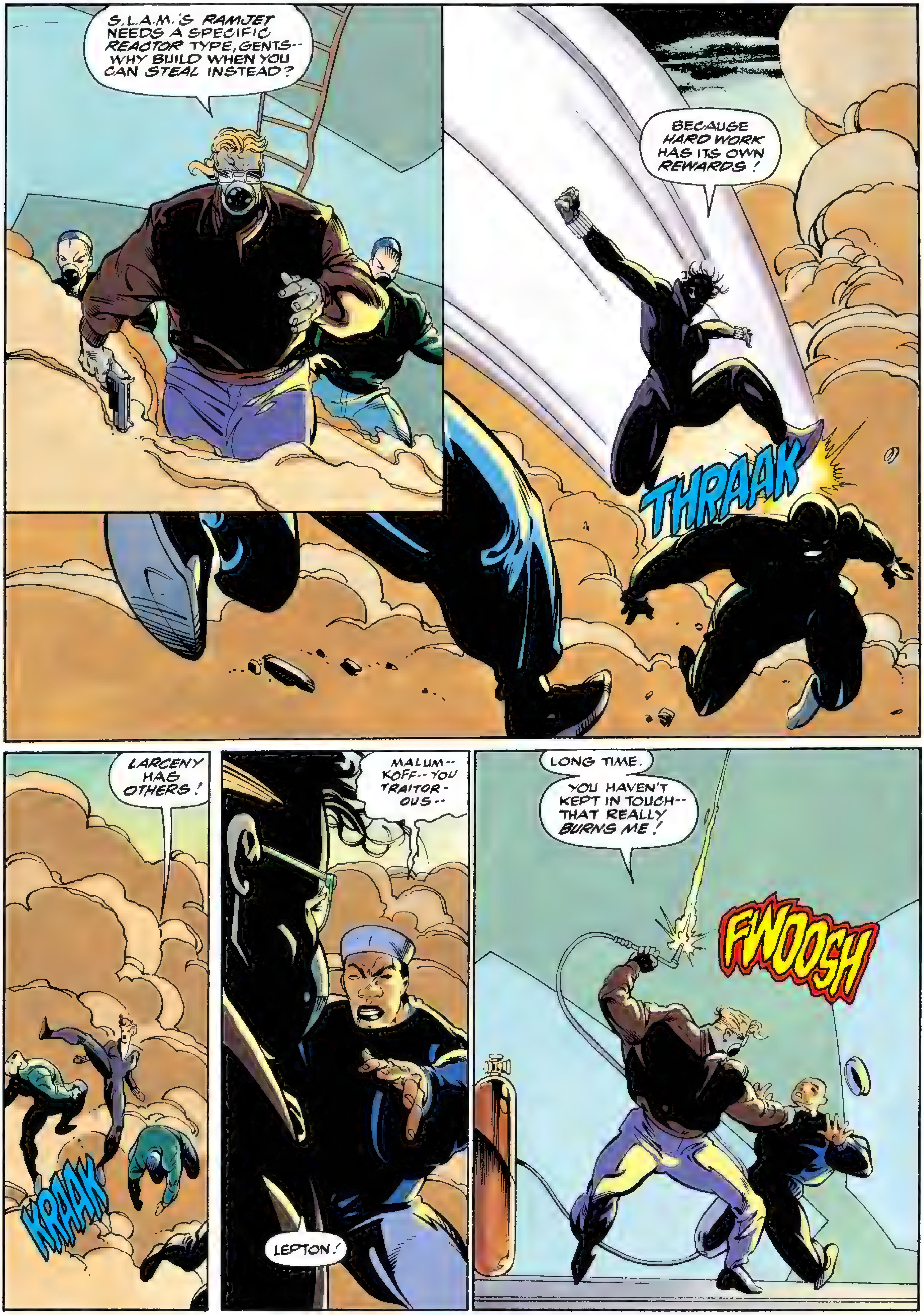

CLIK
THE PHOTOS FROM AN OFFICIAL CASE FILE MARKED "PETER MALUM" SHOW ONLY THE AFTERMATH.
FBI PROPERT
CLIK
THE MAN WITH THE *DEATH'S HEAD* OVER HIS *HEART* FILLS IN THE REST OF THE DETAILS.
CLIK
"YOU *LOADED* THE GUN ALL ON YOUR OWN," THE JUDGE, JURY AND EXECUTIONER TELLS THE KILLER WITH EACH ROUND FED INTO THE CLIP.
CLIK
"I'M JUST THE ONE WHO *PULLS* THE TRIGGER..."
CHUNK

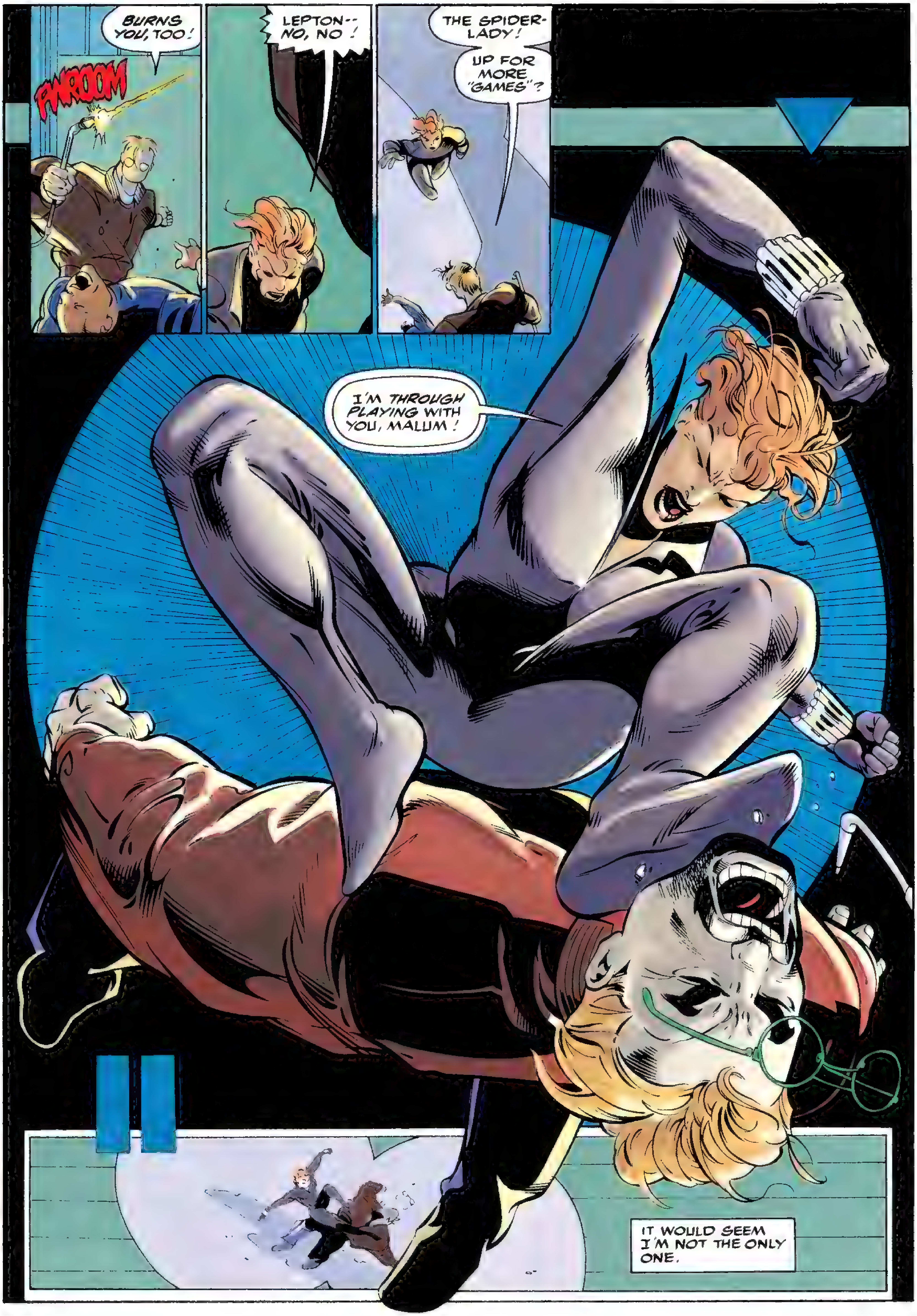

RIGHT ON SCHEDULE, DOC, YES INDEEDY, RIGHT WE ARE!
ONCE IT'S ALL TOGETHER, THEY CAN'T HELP BUT KNUCKLE UNDER WITH A *PARDON* FOR YOU AND *CASH* FOR ME AND MINE, NOPE, THEY CAN'T HELP BUT!
YOU SHOULD HAVE HIGHER *ASPIRATIONS* THAN *MONETARY* IN THE FACE OF SUCH *DESTRUCTIVE* POWER, CASSADY!
HAVEN'T YOU EVER CONSIDERED *WORLD DOMINATION*?
UH... NO.
HMM, NEITHER HAVE I. I *NEVER* HAD MUCH USE FOR THE *WORLD* MYSELF...
...WHICH IS WHY I *BUILT* THE THING IN THE *FIRST PLACE*, I SUPPOSE.

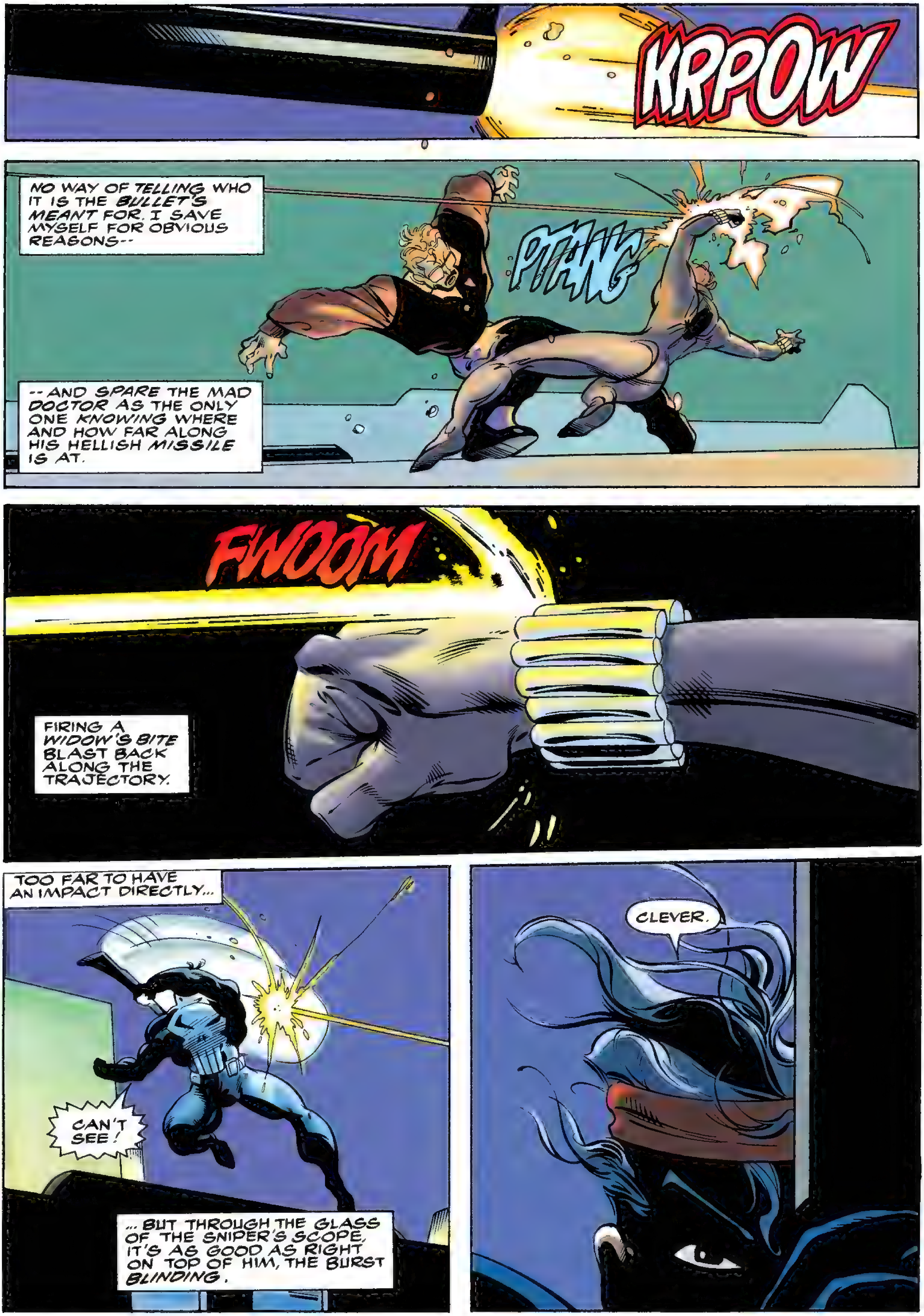

"I APPRECIATE YOUR SEEING ME, ENGINEER LEPTON."
"SAN FRANCISCO'S HOME PORT, MISS ROMANOV. SEEN ALL THE TOURIST SIGHTS ALREADY..."
51
...AIN'T NEVER SPENT THE DAY WITH AN EX-RUSSIAN SPY BEFORE, THOUGH!
ALL RIGHT, YOU'RE CLEARED!
SP
NOT TO DAMPEN YOUR ENTHUSIASM, ENGINEER, BUT THE IDEA BEHIND THE DISGUISE IS TO DOWNPLAY THAT ASPECT!
WHILE THIS ASSIGNMENT HAS OFFICIAL SANCTION, ESPIONAGE IS NEVER A THING COMFORTABLE OUT IN THE OPEN!
RIGHT... GOTCHA!

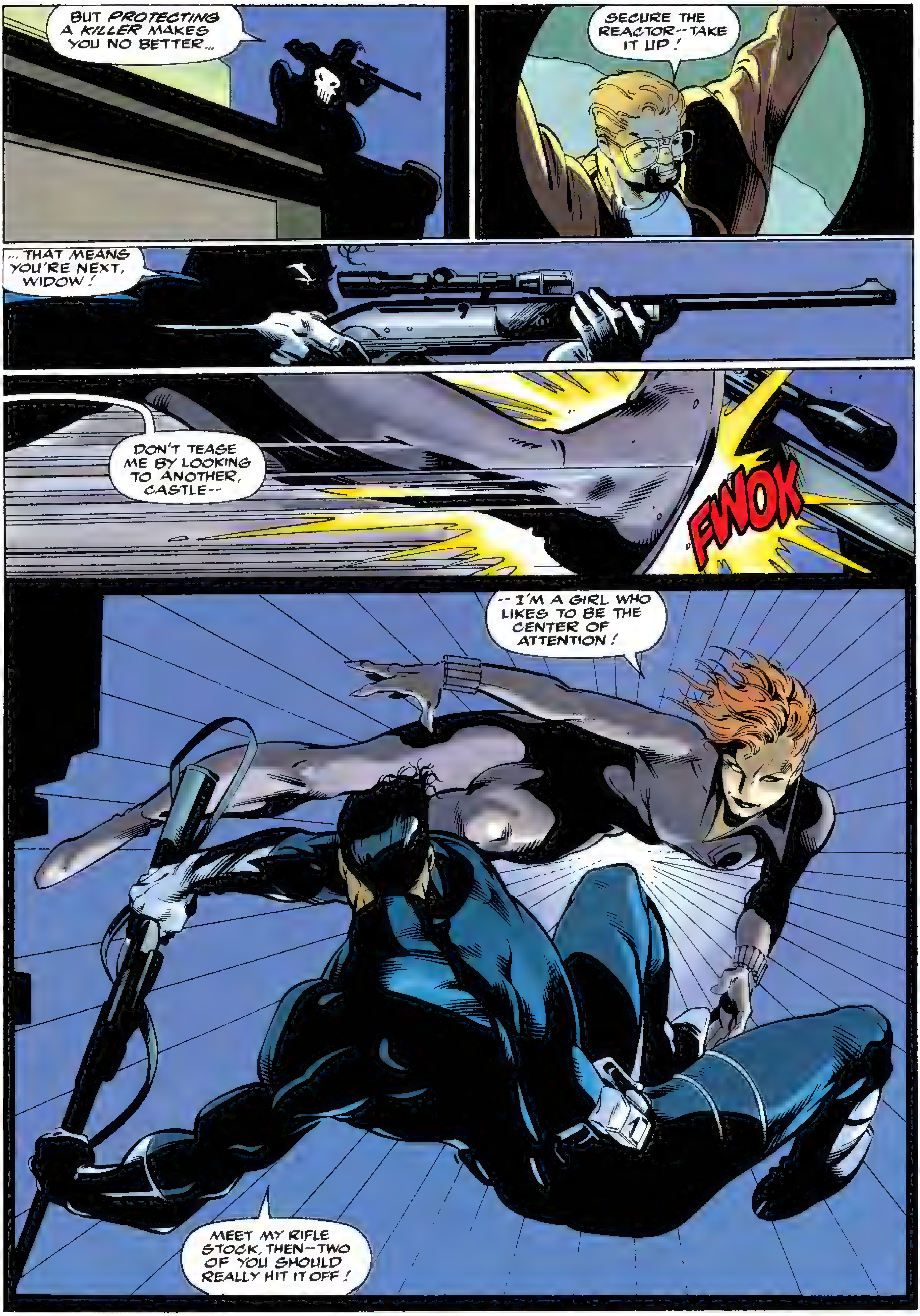

I NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR *RELATIONSHIP* WITH *MALUM* -- YOU *WORKED* WITH HIM ON PROJECT *PLUTO*, YES?
UNDER HIM -- PETER MALUM *DON'T WORK WITH* ANYBODY!
YEAH, AND LIKE I TOLD THE S.H.I.E.L.D. AGENTS, MALUM'S BEEN TRYING TO GET IN *TOUCH*! MAYBE TO WORK ON A NEW S.L.A.M.? I HONESTLY DON'T KNOW!
GOT A QUESTION FOR YOU, TOO... I'M NOT BEING *CHAUVINISTIC* HERE OR NOTHING, BUT WHAT'S A NICE LADY LIKE YOU DOIN' IN SUCH A *DIRTY BUSINESS*?
THERE ARE... *REASONS*...
AND HOW DOES THE *KGB RECRUIT* THIS ROMANOV WOMAN?
THE USUAL. *LIES*. EMOTIONAL *TERRORISM*.
WE BEGIN BY TELLING HER OF THE *"DEATH"* OF HER *HUSBAND*...
A TRAGEDY, NATALIA! THE RED GUARDIAN WAS A GREAT HERO TO THE SOVIET PEOPLE!
L-LET ME... LET ME *HONOR* HIS *MEMORY*, COLONEL...

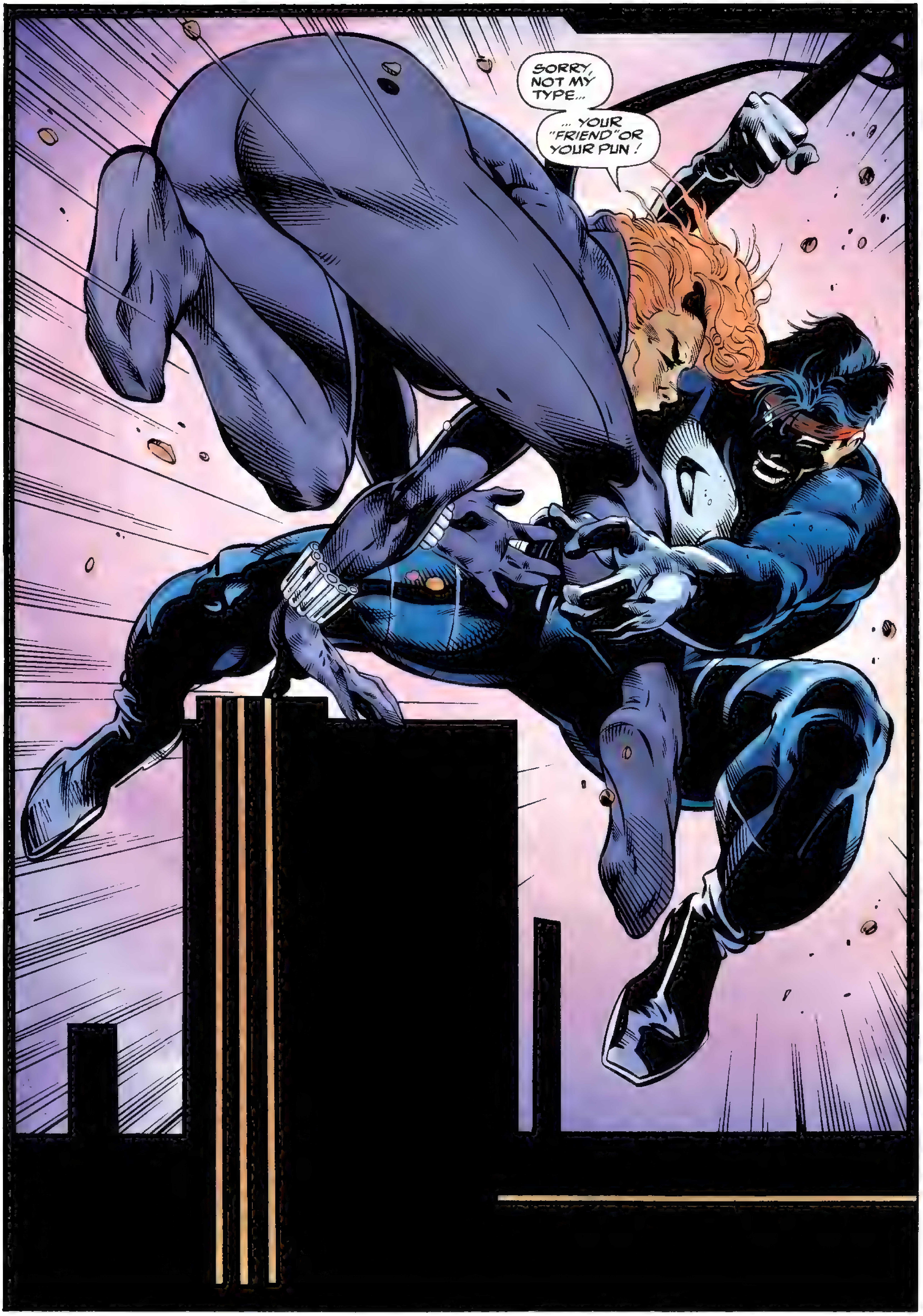

...LET ME SERVE THE STATE IN HIS PLACE!
WELL, IF YOU INSIST...
HOW COULD YOU HAVE BEEN SO SURE OF WINNING HER OVER, COLONEL?
IT IS THE KGB'S JOB TO BE SURE...
YOU'RE RIGHT, ENGINEER... IT IS A DIRTY BUSINESS.
BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE... AND NOW I NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT WHAT MALUM WOULD NEED TO MAKE HIS TWISTED DREAM REALITY.
TO BEGIN, WHAT WOULD THIS MISSILE'S REACTOR BE LIKE?
THAT CRUISER'S IN FOR RETRO-FITTING...
...WE CAN CHECK OUT ITS POWER PLANT AS AN EXAMPLE!
WHUP
WHUP
WHUP WHUP
TAKE US IN, CASSADY!
I'M ON IT, DOC... IT'S JUST DEAD NAVY PILOTS MAKE THINGS SO AWKWARD SOMETIMES, YOU BETCHA THEY DO!
THOOM
TEAR GAS!
CLEAR THE DRY-DOCK!

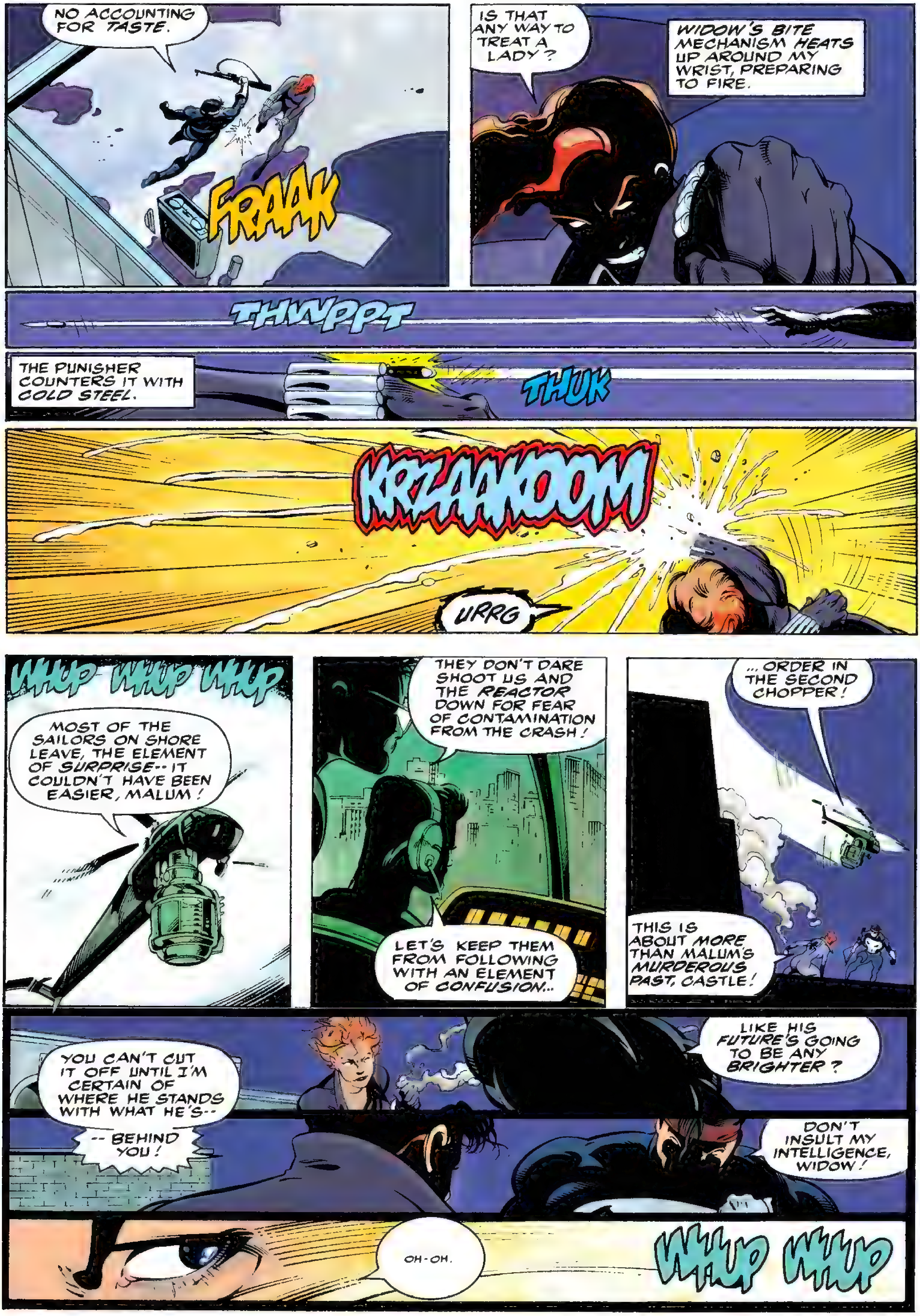

S.L.A.M.'S RAMJET NEEDS A SPECIFIC REACTOR TYPE, GENTS-- WHY BUILD WHEN YOU CAN STEAL INSTEAD?
BECAUSE HARD WORK HAS ITS OWN REWARDS!
THRAAK
LARCENY HAS OTHERS!
KRAAK
MALUM-- KOFF-- YOU TRAITOR-OUS--
LEPTON!
LONG TIME.
YOU HAVEN'T KEPT IN TOUCH-- THAT REALLY BURNS ME!
FWOOSH

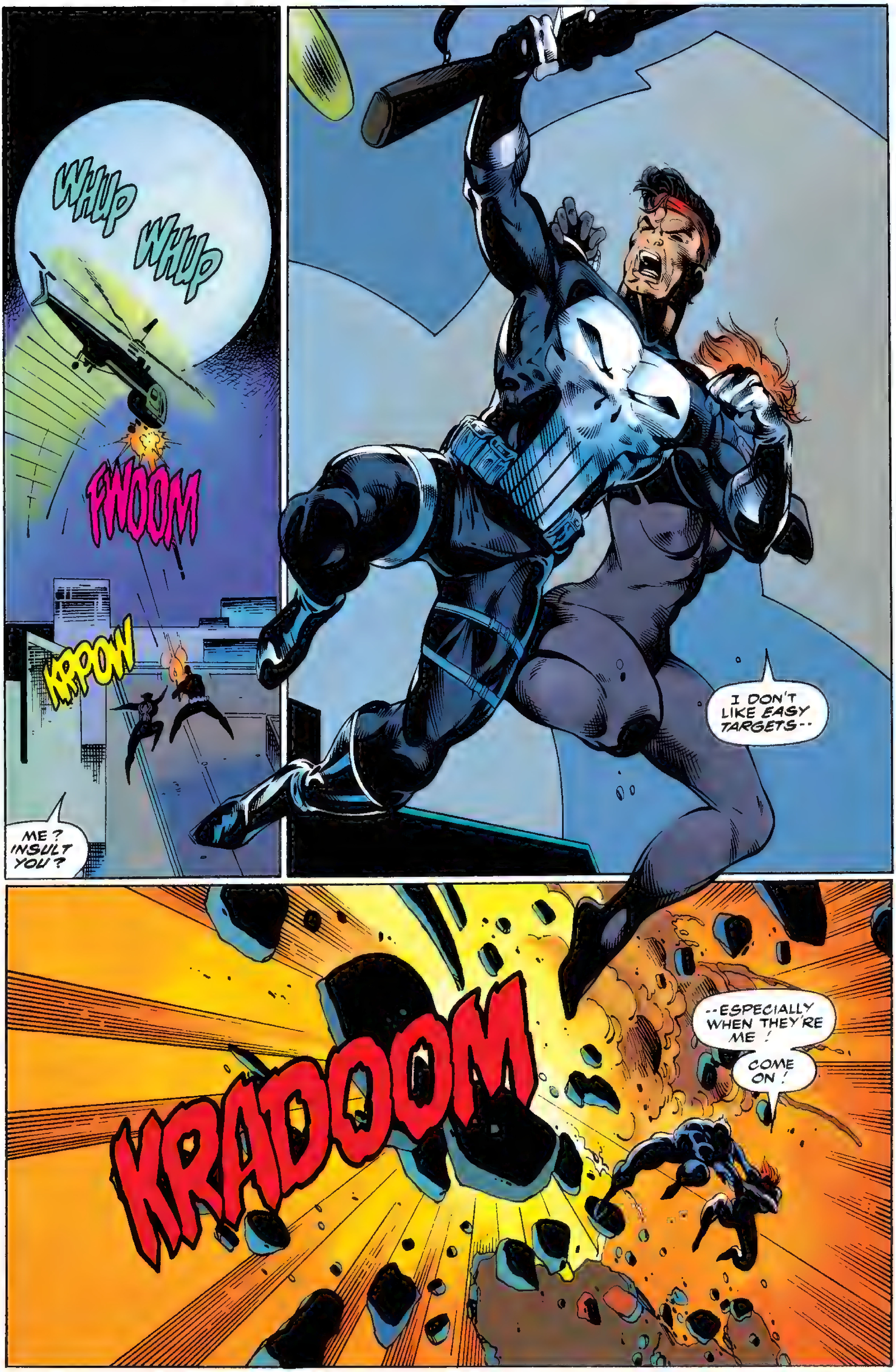

BURNS YOU, TOO!
PHROOM
LEPTON-- NO, NO!
THE SPIDER-LADY!
UP FOR MORE "GAMES"?
I'M THROUGH PLAYING WITH YOU, MALUM!
IT WOULD SEEM I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE.

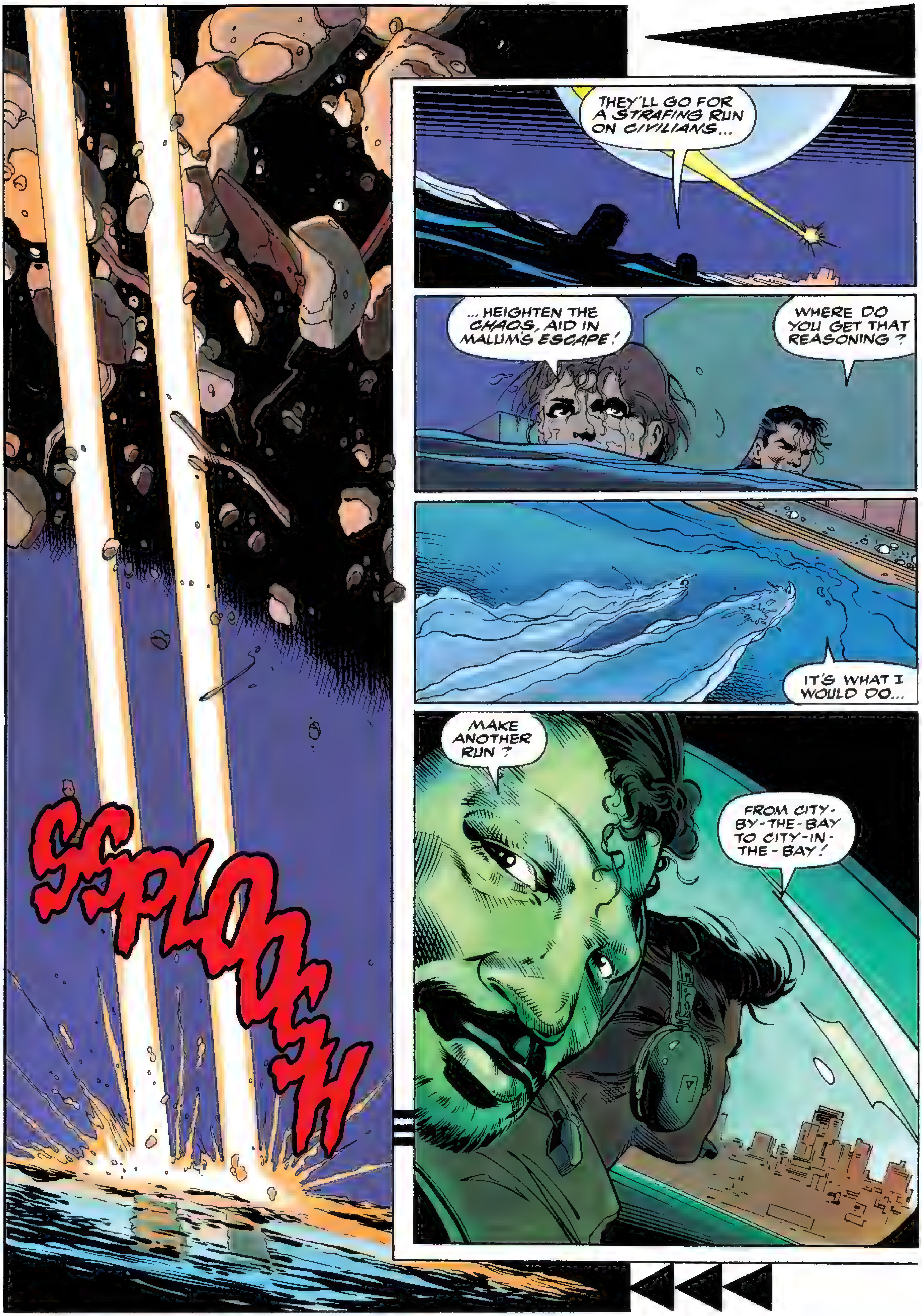

KRPOW
NO WAY OF TELLING WHO IT IS THE BULLET'S MEANT FOR. I SAVE MYSELF FOR OBVIOUS REASONS--
PTANG
--AND SPARE THE MAD DOCTOR AS THE ONLY ONE KNOWING WHERE AND HOW FAR ALONG HIS HELLISH MISSILE IS AT.
FWOOM
FIRING A WIDOW'S BITE BLAST BACK ALONG THE TRAJECTORY.
TOO FAR TO HAVE AN IMPACT DIRECTLY...
CAN'T SEE!
... BUT THROUGH THE GLASS OF THE SNIPER'S SCOPE, IT'S AS GOOD AS RIGHT ON TOP OF HIM, THE BURST BLINDING.
CLEVER.

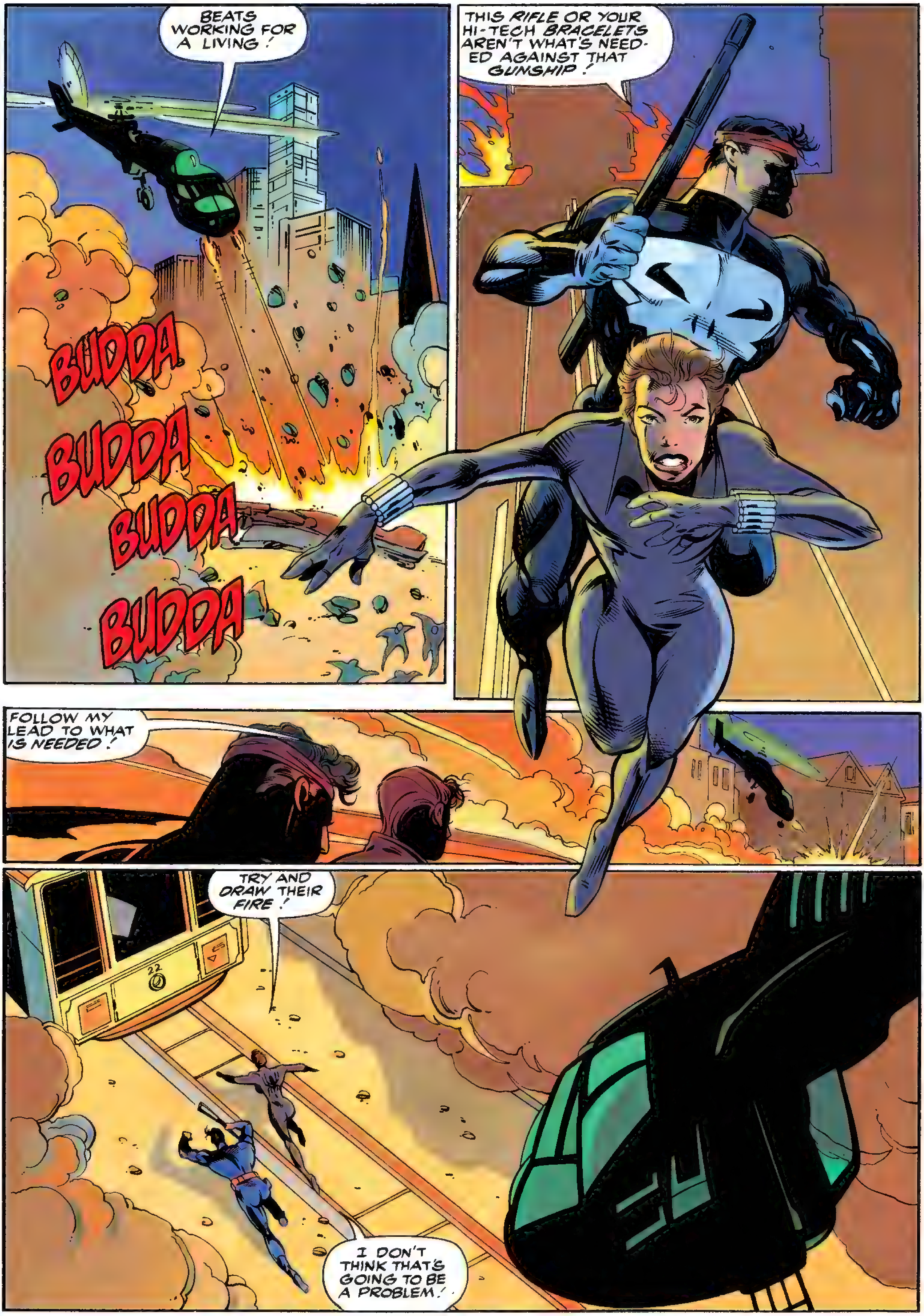

BUT *PROTECTING* A *KILLER* MAKES YOU NO BETTER...
SECURE THE REACTOR--TAKE IT UP!
...THAT MEANS YOU'RE NEXT, WIDOW!
DON'T TEASE ME BY LOOKING TO ANOTHER, CASTLE--
FWOK
--I'M A GIRL WHO LIKES TO BE THE CENTER OF ATTENTION!
MEET MY RIFLE STOCK, THEN--TWO OF YOU SHOULD REALLY HIT IT OFF!

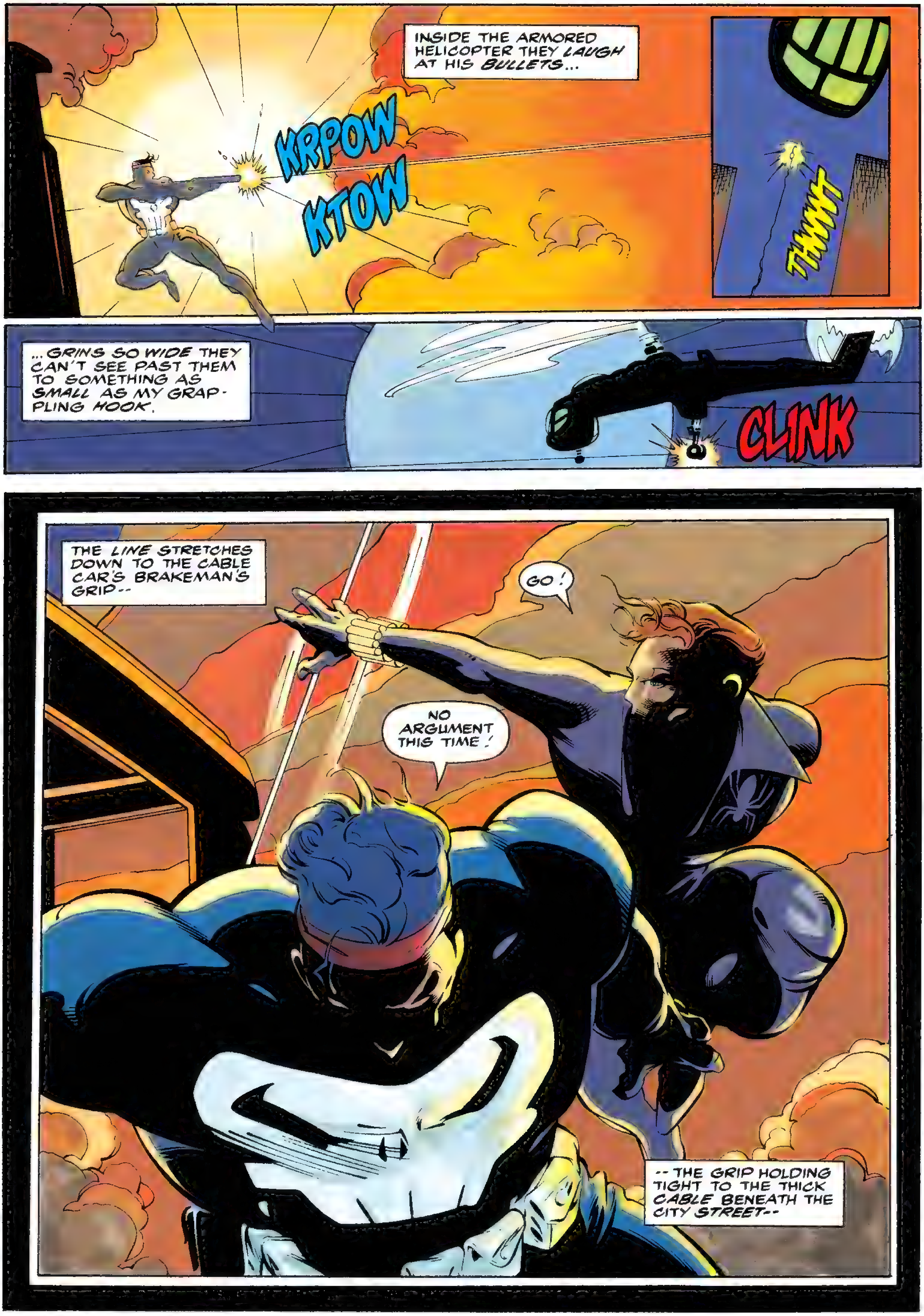

SORRY, NOT MY TYPE...
... YOUR "FRIEND" OR YOUR PUN!

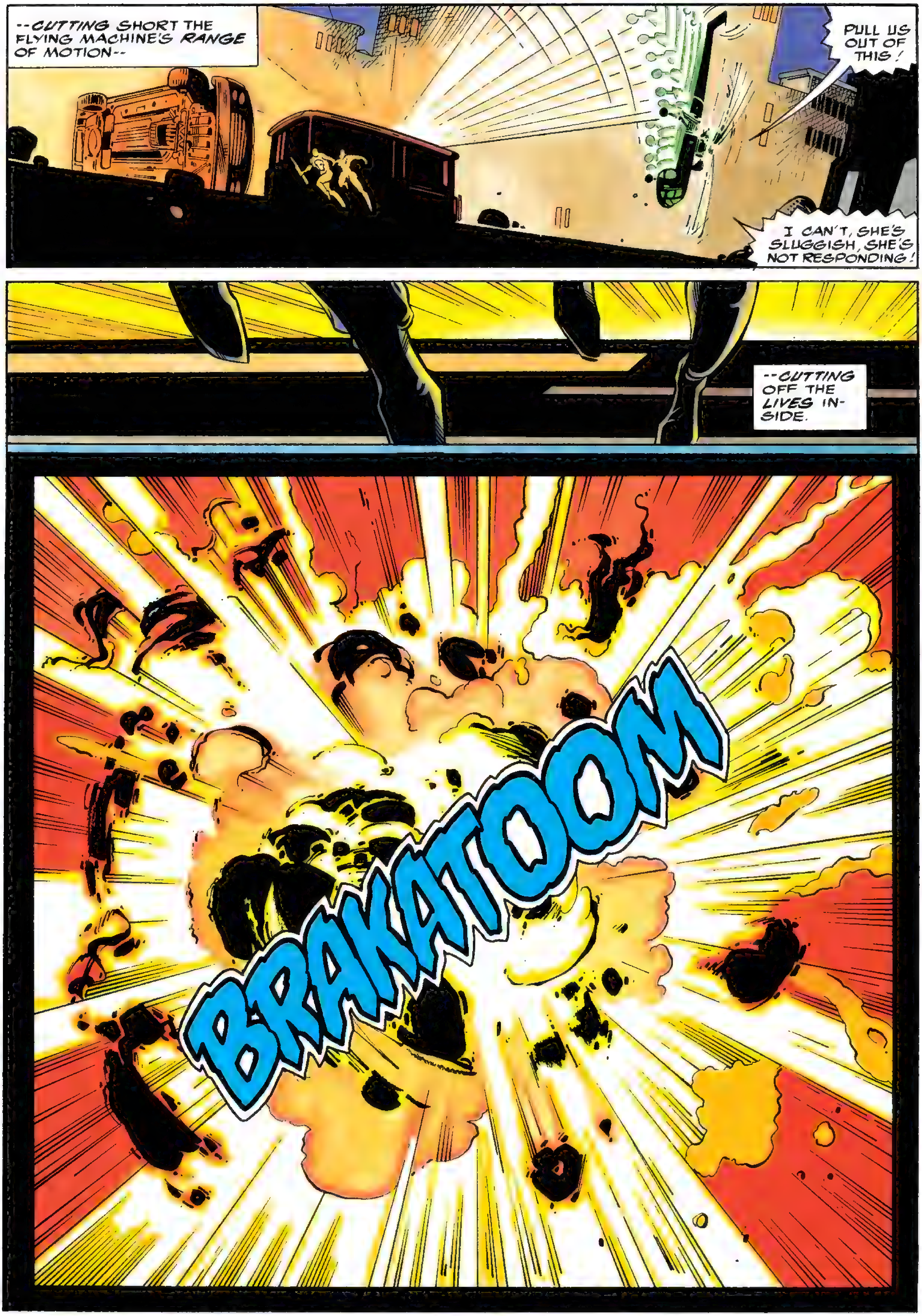

NO ACCOUNTING FOR *TASTE*.
FRAAK
IS THAT ANY WAY TO TREAT A LADY?
WIDOW'S BITE MECHANISM *HEATS* UP AROUND MY WRIST, PREPARING TO FIRE.
THWPPT
THE PUNISHER COUNTERS IT WITH *COLD STEEL*.
THUK
KRZAAKOOM
URRG
WHUP WHUP WHUP
MOST OF THE SAILORS ON SHORE LEAVE, THE ELEMENT OF *SURPRISE*-- IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN EASIER, MALUM!
THEY DON'T DARE SHOOT US AND THE *REACTOR* DOWN FOR FEAR OF CONTAMINATION FROM THE CRASH!
LET'S KEEP THEM FROM FOLLOWING WITH AN ELEMENT OF *CONFUSION*...
...ORDER IN THE SECOND CHOPPER!
THIS IS ABOUT *MORE* THAN MALUM'S *MURDEROUS* PAST, CASTLE!
YOU CAN'T CUT IT OFF UNTIL I'M CERTAIN OF WHERE HE STANDS WITH WHAT HE'S--
LIKE HIS *FUTURE'S* GOING TO BE ANY *BRIGHTER*?
-- BEHIND YOU!
DON'T INSULT MY INTELLIGENCE, WIDOW!
OH-OH.
WHUP WHUP

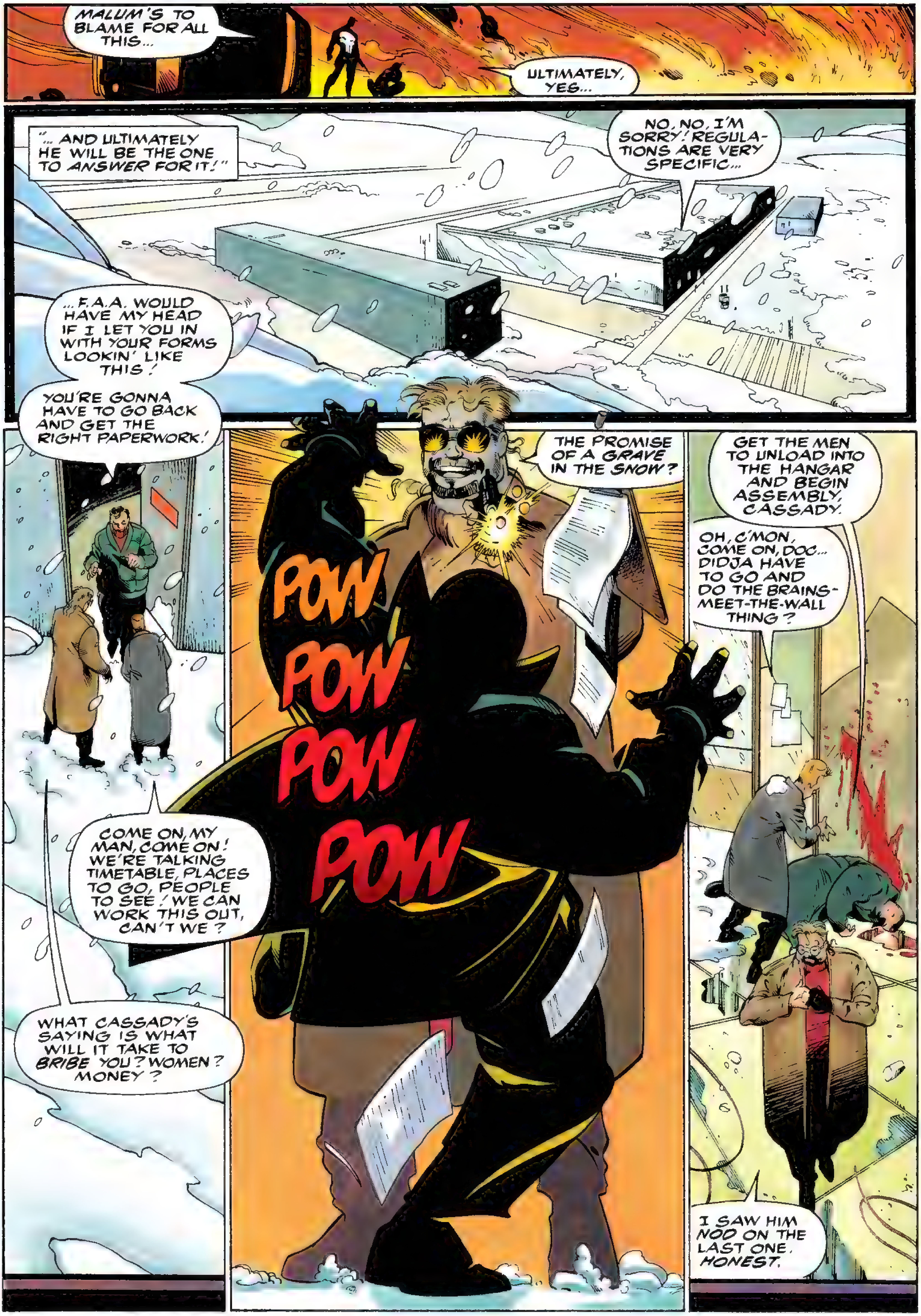

WHUP
WHUP
FWOOM
KRPOW
ME? INSULT YOU?
I DON'T LIKE *EASY* TARGETS--
KRADOOM
--ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY'RE ME!
COME ON!

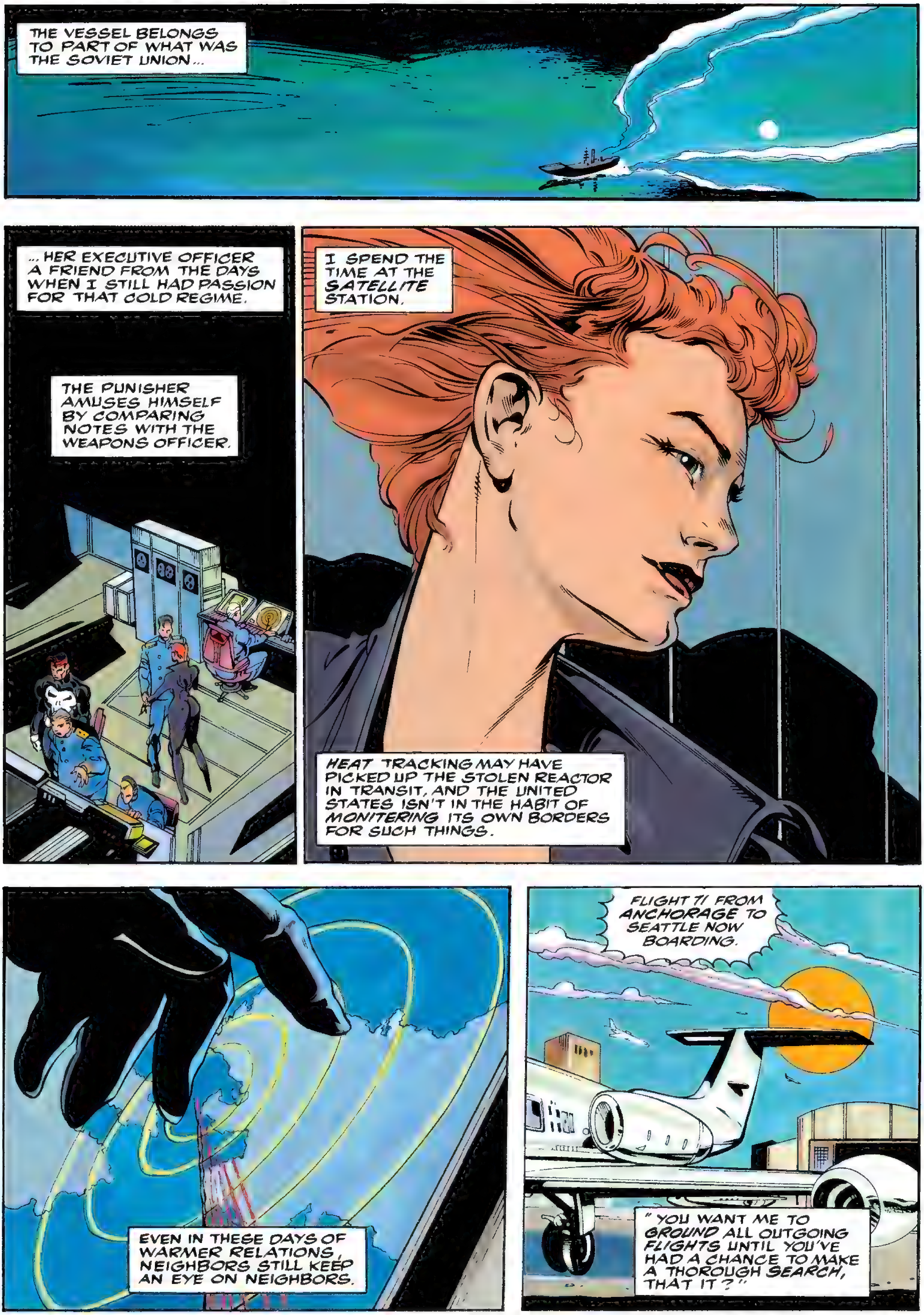

SSPLOOSH
THEY'LL GO FOR A STRAFING RUN ON CIVILIANS...
...HEIGHTEN THE CHAOS, AID IN MALUM'S ESCAPE!
WHERE DO YOU GET THAT REASONING?
IT'S WHAT I WOULD DO...
MAKE ANOTHER RUN?
FROM CITY-BY-THE-BAY TO CITY-IN-THE-BAY!

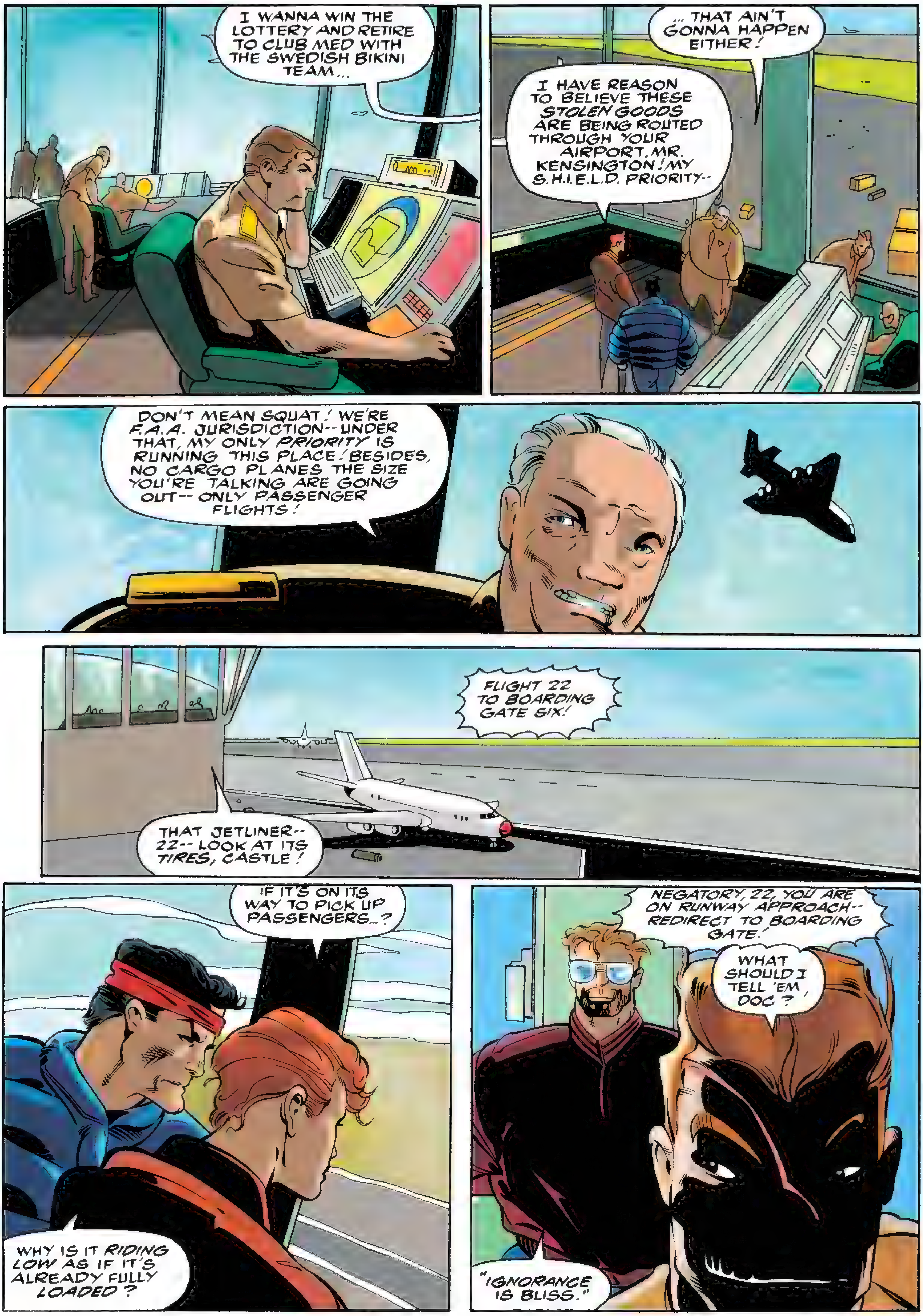

BEATS WORKING FOR A LIVING!
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
THIS RIFLE OR YOUR HI-TECH BRACELETS AREN'T WHAT'S NEEDED AGAINST THAT GUNSHIP!
FOLLOW MY LEAD TO WHAT IS NEEDED!
TRY AND DRAW THEIR FIRE!
22
I DON'T THINK THAT'S GOING TO BE A PROBLEM!

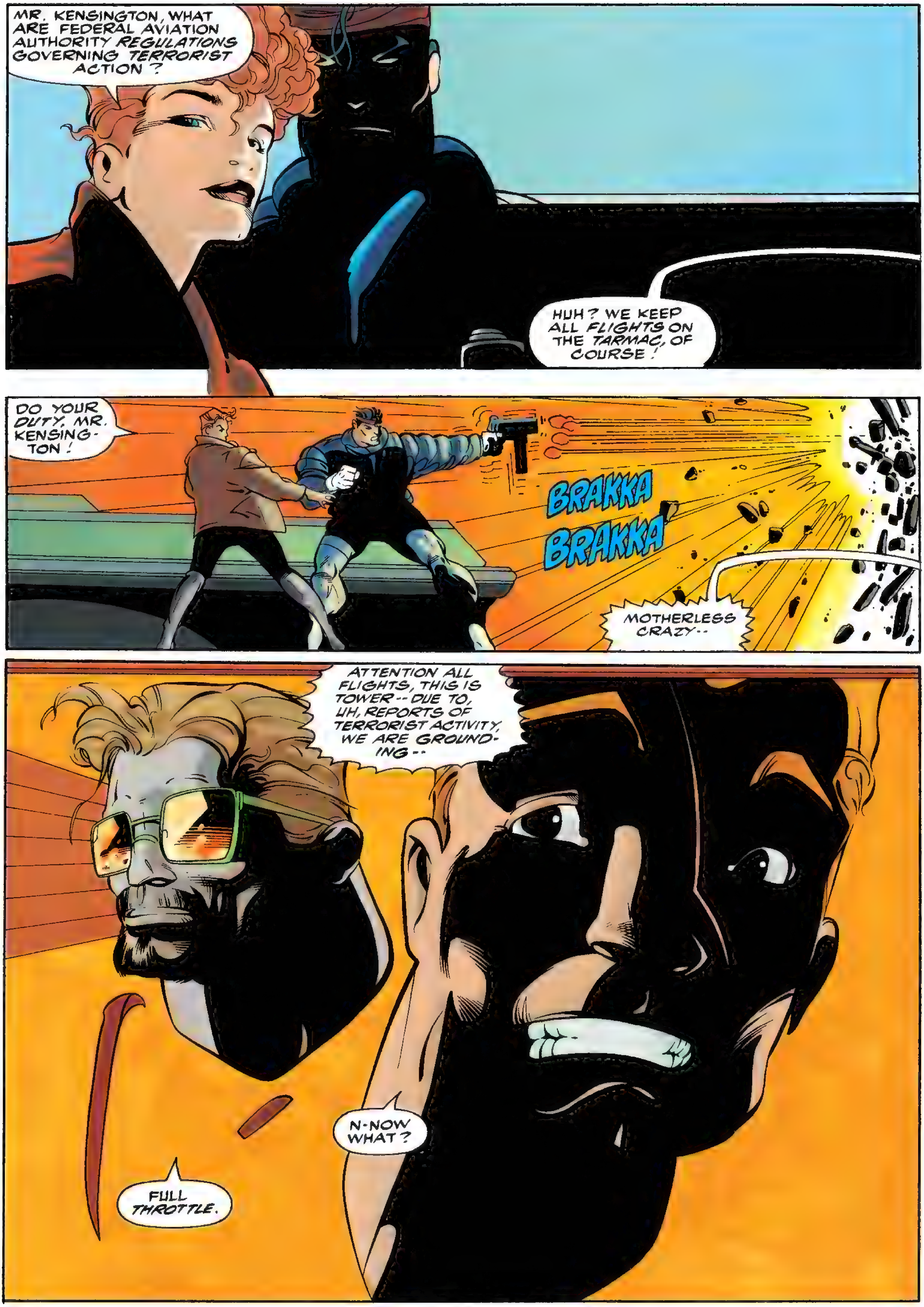

INSIDE THE ARMORED HELICOPTER THEY *LAUGH* AT HIS *BULLETS*...
KRPOW
KTOW
THWWT
...GRINS SO *WIDE* THEY CAN'T SEE PAST THEM TO SOMETHING AS *SMALL* AS MY GRAPPLING *HOOK*.
CLINK
THE *LINE* STRETCHES DOWN TO THE CABLE CAR'S BRAKEMAN'S GRIP--
GO!
NO ARGUMENT THIS TIME!
--THE GRIP HOLDING TIGHT TO THE THICK *CABLE* BENEATH THE CITY *STREET*--

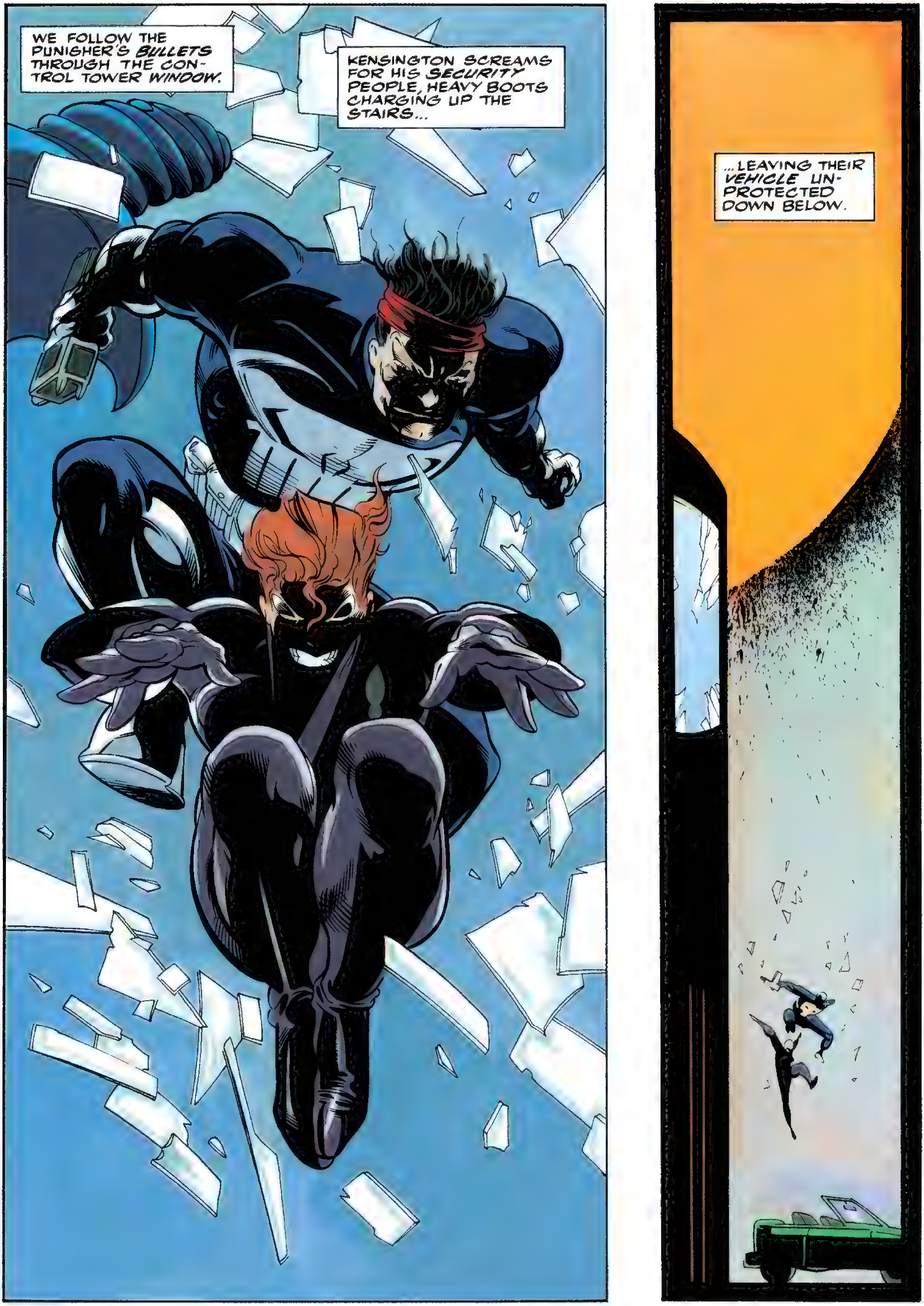

--CUTTING SHORT THE FLYING MACHINE'S RANGE OF MOTION--
PULL US OUT OF THIS!
I CAN'T, SHE'S SLUGGISH, SHE'S NOT RESPONDING!
--CUTTING OFF THE LIVES INSIDE.
BRAKATOOM

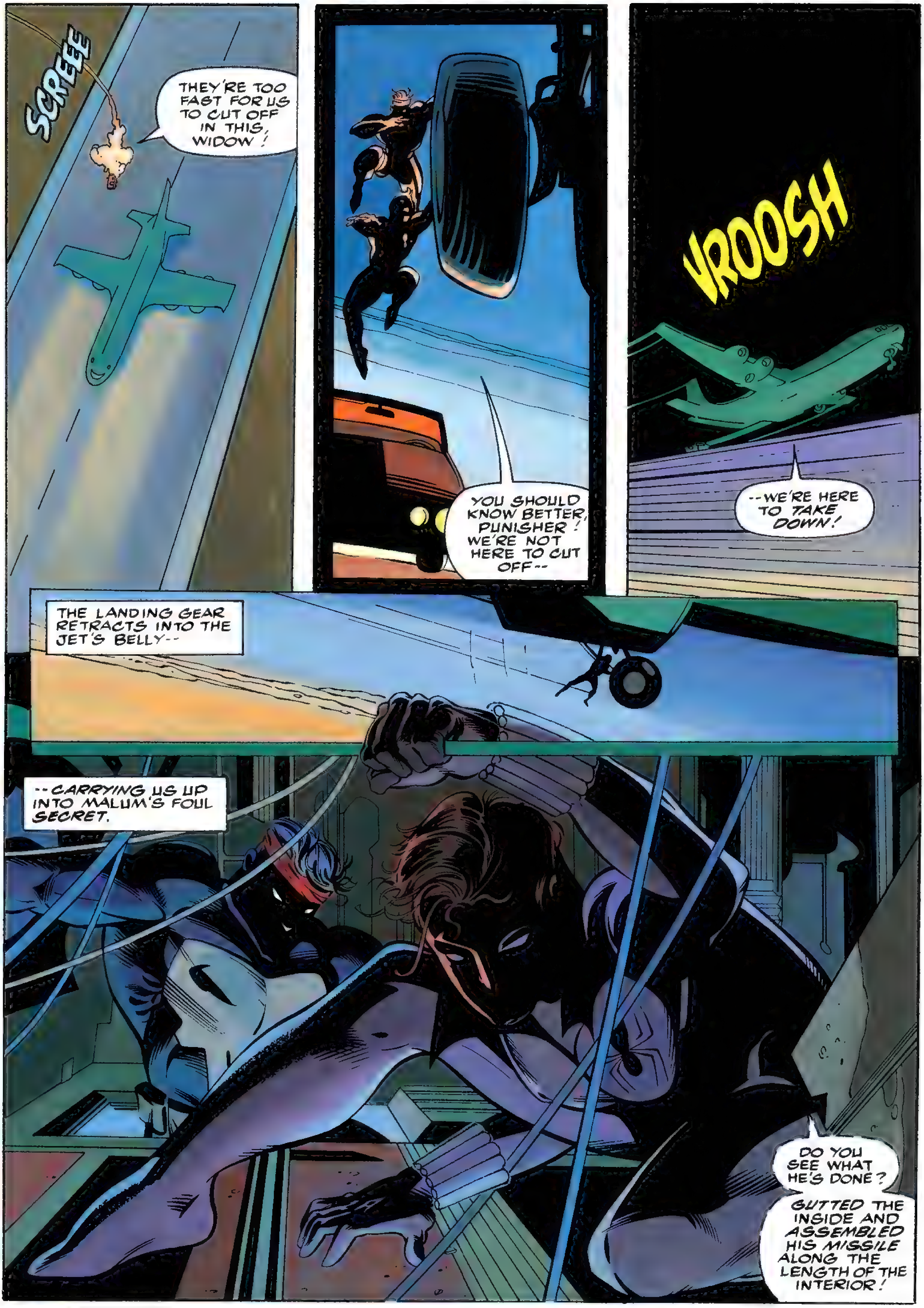

MALUM'S TO BLAME FOR ALL THIS...
ULTIMATELY, YES...
"... AND ULTIMATELY HE WILL BE THE ONE TO ANSWER FOR IT!"
NO, NO, I'M SORRY! REGULATIONS ARE VERY SPECIFIC...
...F.A.A. WOULD HAVE MY HEAD IF I LET YOU IN WITH YOUR FORMS LOOKIN' LIKE THIS!
YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO GO BACK AND GET THE RIGHT PAPERWORK!
COME ON, MY MAN, COME ON! WE'RE TALKING TIMETABLE, PLACES TO GO, PEOPLE TO SEE! WE CAN WORK THIS OUT, CAN'T WE?
WHAT CASSADY'S SAYING IS WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO *BRIBE* YOU? WOMEN? MONEY?
THE PROMISE OF A *GRAVE* IN THE *SNOW*?
POW
POW
POW
POW
GET THE MEN TO UNLOAD INTO THE HANGAR AND BEGIN ASSEMBLY, CASSADY.
OH, C'MON, COME ON, DOC... DIDJA HAVE TO GO AND DO THE BRAINS-MEET-THE-WALL THING?
I SAW HIM *NOD* ON THE LAST ONE. *HONEST.*

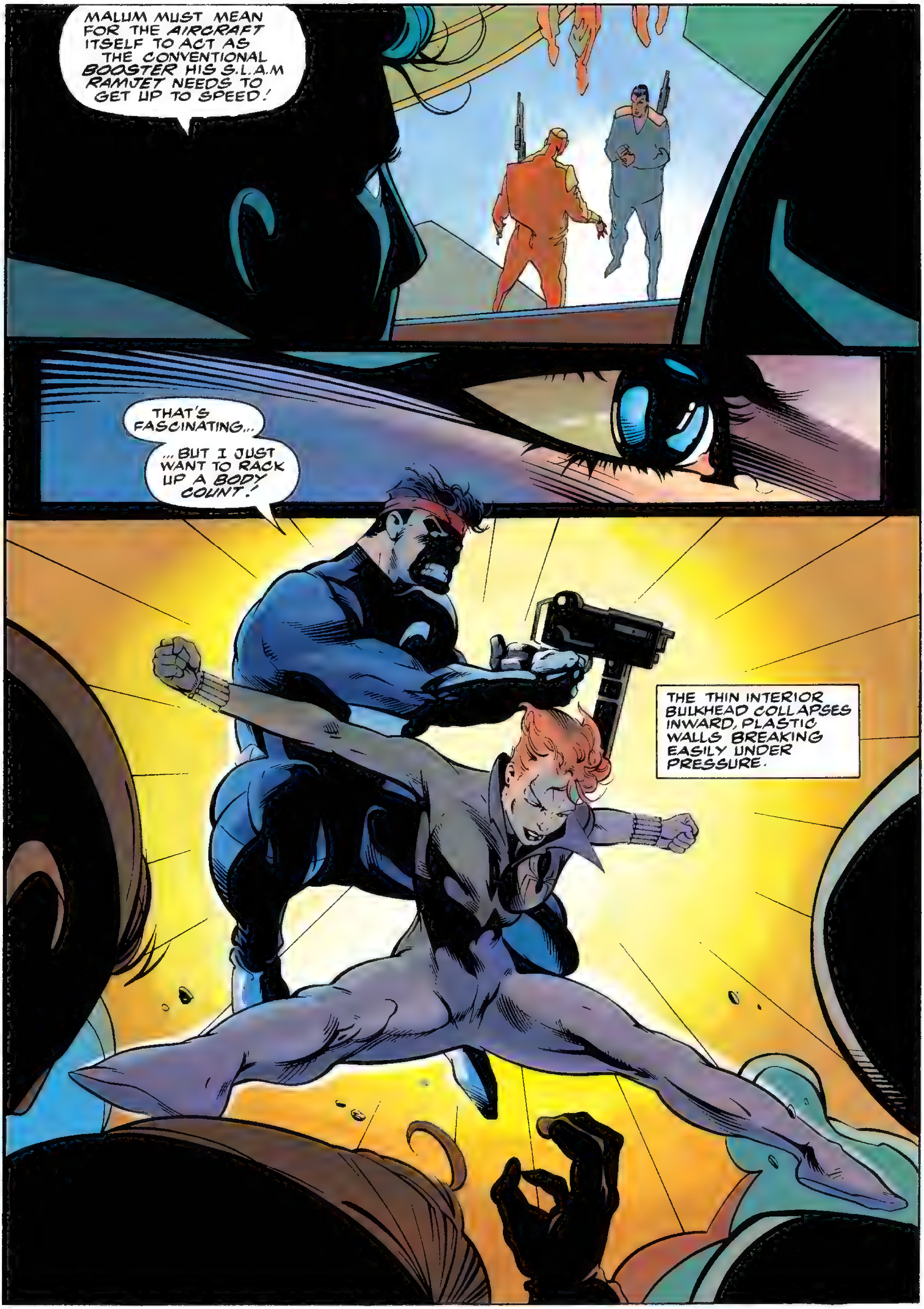

THE VESSEL BELONGS TO PART OF WHAT WAS THE SOVIET UNION...
... HER EXECUTIVE OFFICER A FRIEND FROM THE DAYS WHEN I STILL HAD PASSION FOR THAT COLD REGIME.
THE PUNISHER AMUSES HIMSELF BY COMPARING NOTES WITH THE WEAPONS OFFICER.
I SPEND THE TIME AT THE *SATELLITE* STATION.
HEAT TRACKING MAY HAVE PICKED UP THE *STOLEN REACTOR* IN TRANSIT, AND THE UNITED STATES ISN'T IN THE HABIT OF *MONITERING* ITS OWN BORDERS FOR SUCH THINGS.
EVEN IN THESE DAYS OF WARMER RELATIONS, NEIGHBORS STILL KEEP AN EYE ON NEIGHBORS.
FLIGHT 71 FROM *ANCHORAGE* TO SEATTLE NOW BOARDING.
"YOU WANT ME TO *GROUND* ALL OUTGOING *FLIGHTS* UNTIL YOU'VE HAD A CHANCE TO MAKE A THOROUGH *SEARCH*, THAT IT?"


I WANNA WIN THE LOTTERY AND RETIRE TO CLUB MED WITH THE SWEDISH BIKINI TEAM...
... THAT AIN'T GONNA HAPPEN EITHER!
I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THESE *STOLEN GOODS* ARE BEING ROUTED THROUGH YOUR AIRPORT, MR. KENSINGTON! MY S.H.I.E.L.D. PRIORITY--
DON'T MEAN SQUAT! WE'RE F.A.A. JURISDICTION--UNDER THAT, MY ONLY *PRIORITY* IS RUNNING THIS PLACE! BESIDES, NO CARGO PLANES THE SIZE YOU'RE TALKING ARE GOING OUT-- ONLY PASSENGER FLIGHTS!
FLIGHT 22 TO BOARDING GATE SIX!
THAT JETLINER-- 22-- LOOK AT ITS *TIRES*, CASTLE!
IF IT'S ON ITS WAY TO PICK UP PASSENGERS...?
WHY IS IT *RIDING LOW* AS IF IT'S ALREADY FULLY *LOADED*?
NEGATORY, 22, YOU ARE ON RUNWAY APPROACH-- REDIRECT TO BOARDING GATE!
WHAT SHOULD I TELL 'EM, DOC?
"IGNORANCE IS BLISS."

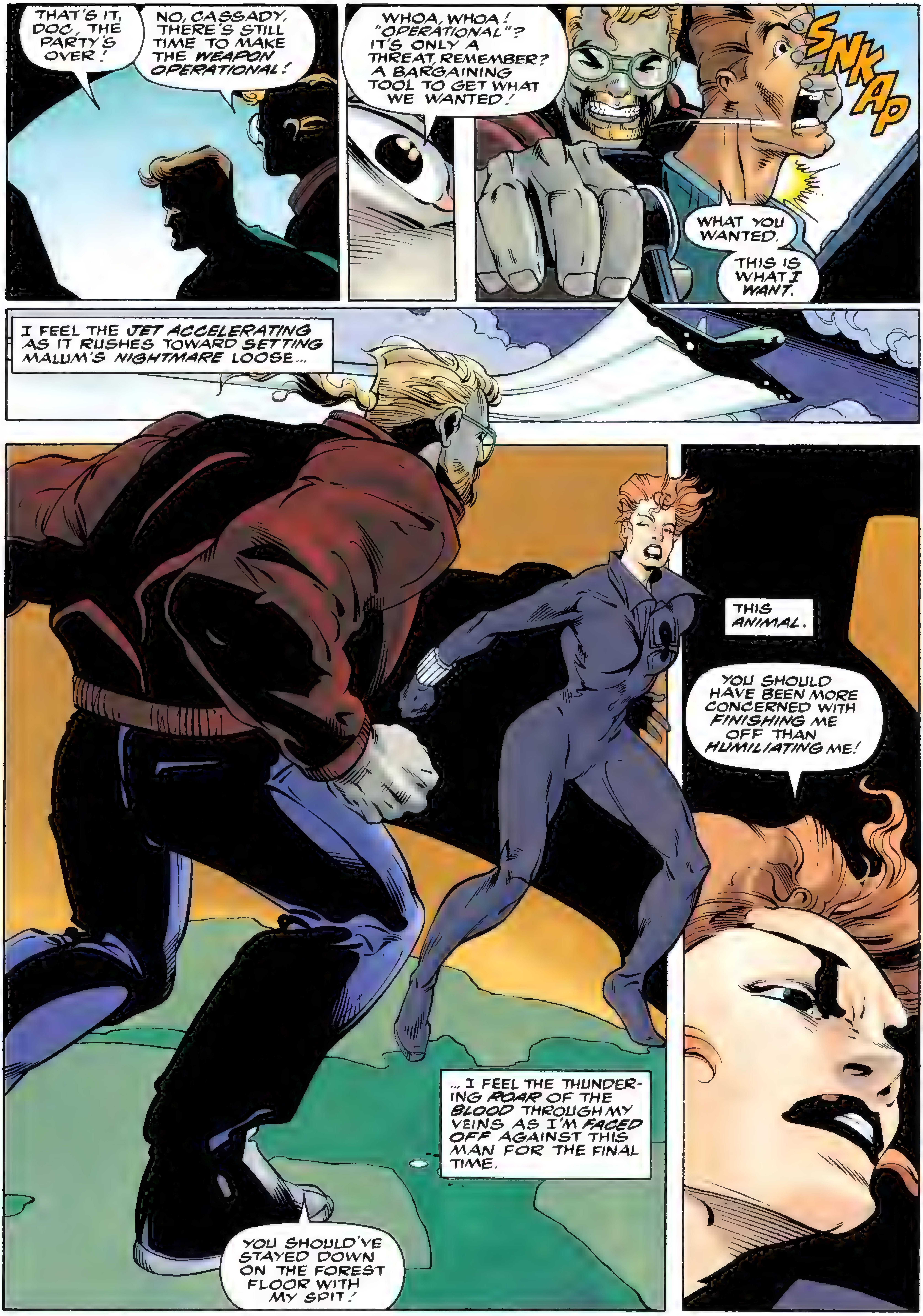

MR. KENSINGTON, WHAT ARE FEDERAL AVIATION AUTHORITY *REGULATIONS* GOVERNING *TERRORIST* ACTION?
HUH? WE KEEP ALL *FLIGHTS* ON THE *TARMAC*, OF COURSE!
DO YOUR *DUTY*, MR. KENSINGTON!
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
MOTHERLESS CRAZY--
ATTENTION ALL FLIGHTS, THIS IS TOWER--DUE TO, UH, REPORTS OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY, WE ARE GROUNDING--
N-NOW WHAT?
FULL *THROTTLE*.

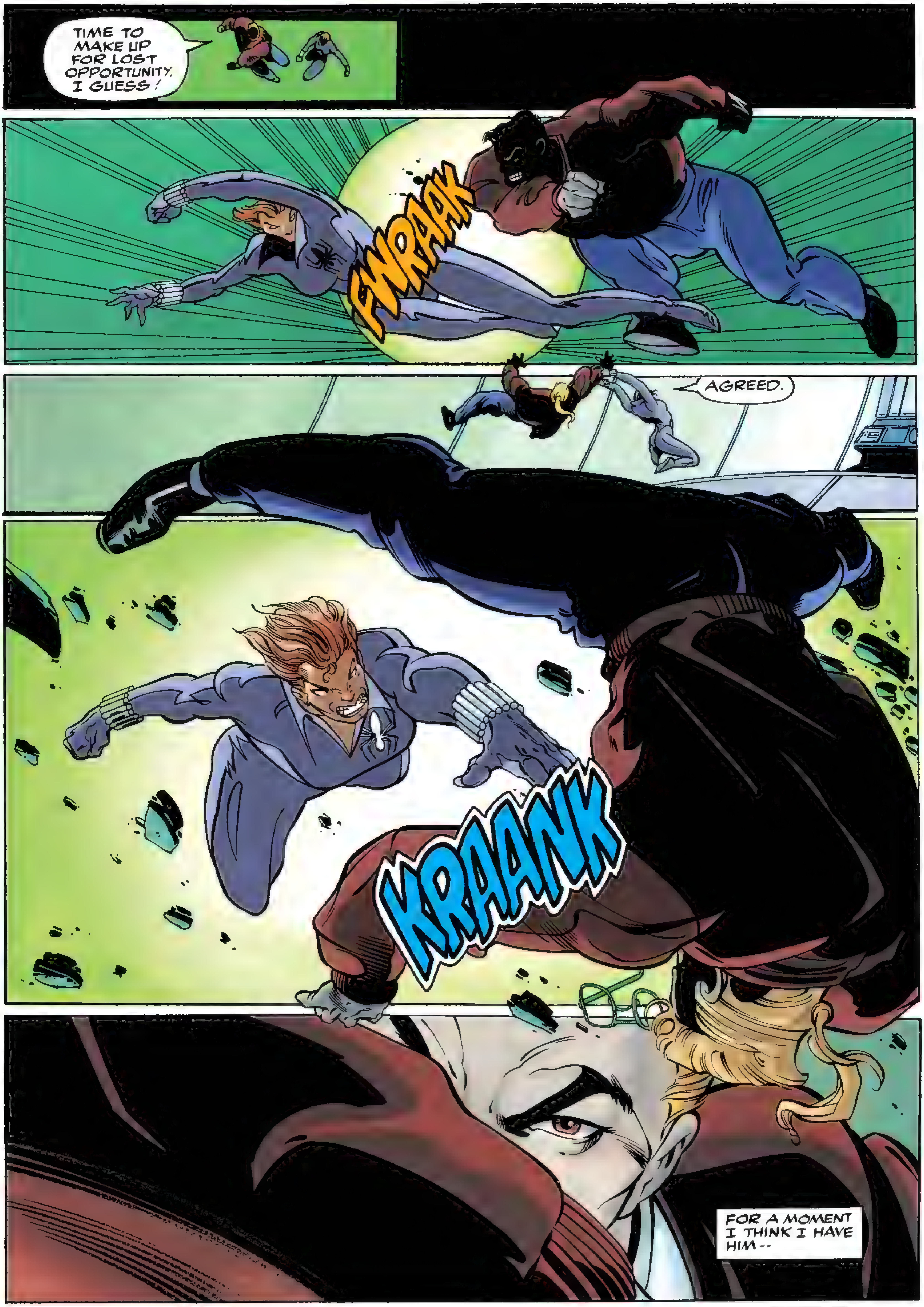

WE FOLLOW THE PUNISHER'S *BULLETS* THROUGH THE CONTROL TOWER *WINDOW.*
KENSINGTON SCREAMS FOR HIS *SECURITY* PEOPLE, HEAVY BOOTS CHARGING UP THE STAIRS...
...LEAVING THEIR *VEHICLE* UNPROTECTED DOWN BELOW.

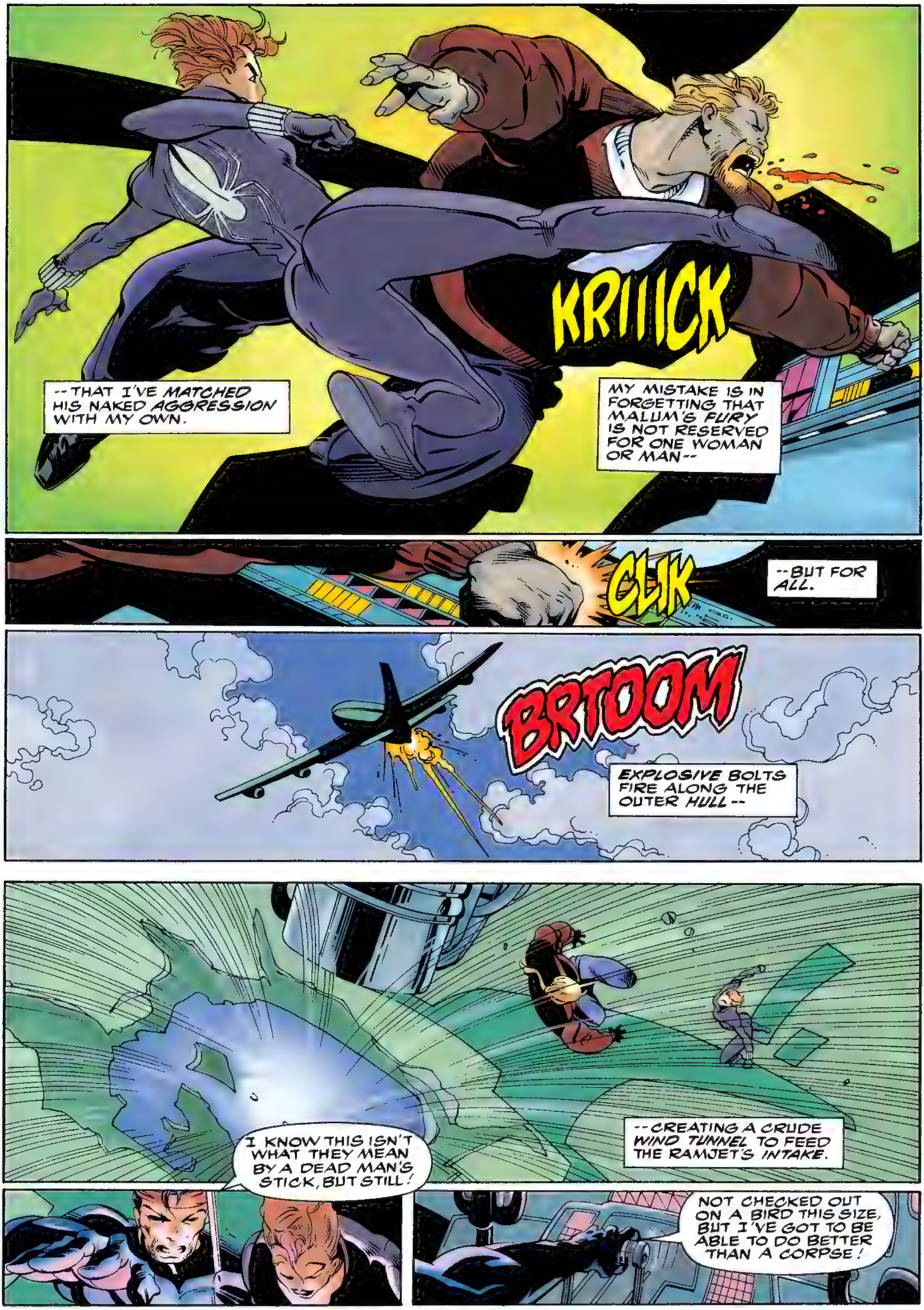

SCREEE
THEY'RE TOO FAST FOR US TO CUT OFF IN THIS, WIDOW!
YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER, PUNISHER! WE'RE NOT HERE TO CUT OFF--
VROOSH
--WE'RE HERE TO TAKE DOWN!
THE LANDING GEAR RETRACTS INTO THE JET'S BELLY--
--CARRYING US UP INTO MALUM'S FOUL SECRET.
DO YOU SEE WHAT HE'S DONE?
GUTTED THE INSIDE AND ASSEMBLED HIS MISSILE ALONG THE LENGTH OF THE INTERIOR!

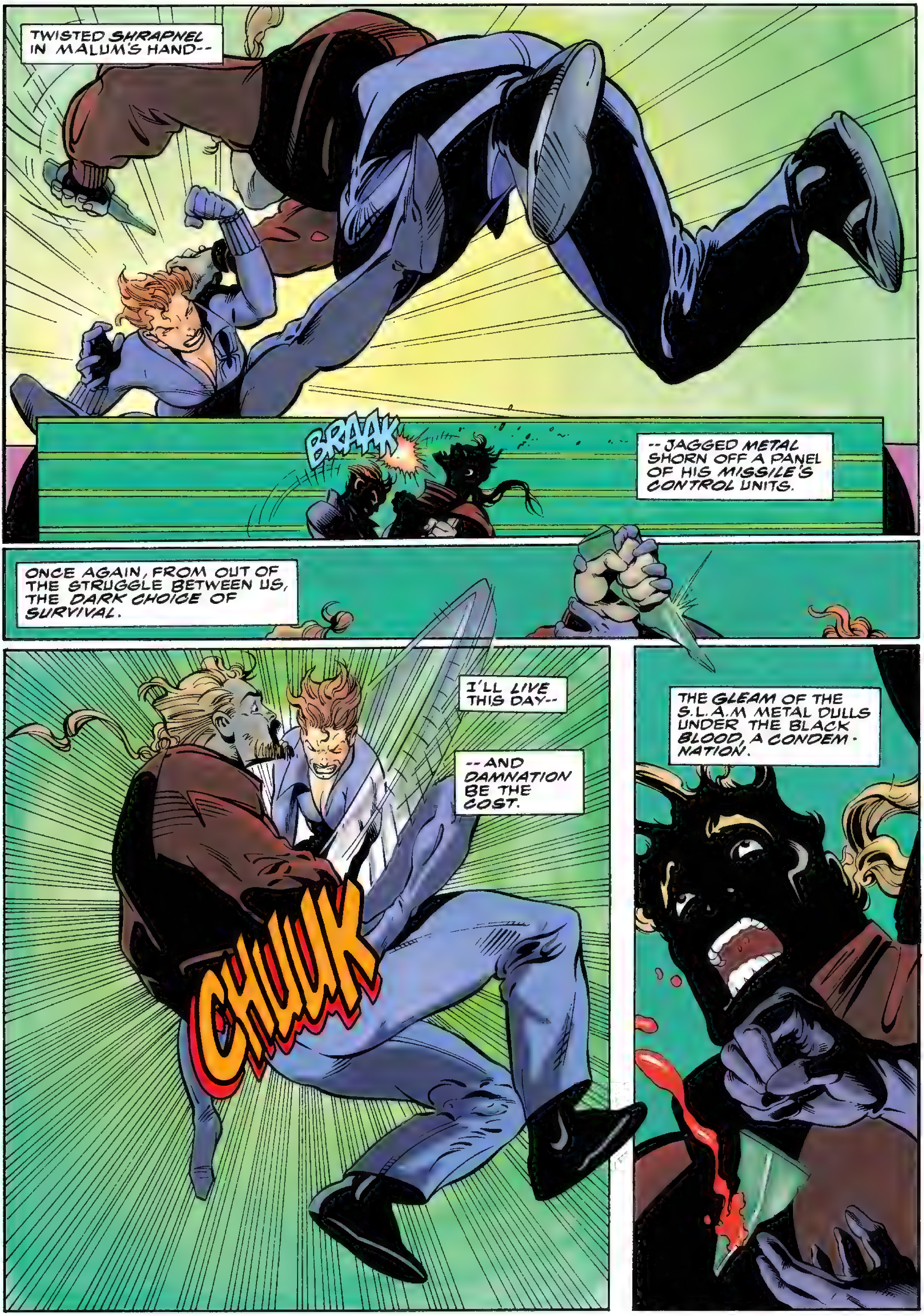

MALUM MUST MEAN FOR THE *AIRCRAFT* ITSELF TO ACT AS THE CONVENTIONAL *BOOSTER* HIS S.L.A.M *RAMJET* NEEDS TO GET UP TO SPEED!
THAT'S FASCINATING...
...BUT I JUST WANT TO RACK UP A *BODY COUNT!*
THE THIN INTERIOR BULKHEAD COLLAPSES INWARD, PLASTIC WALLS BREAKING EASILY UNDER PRESSURE.

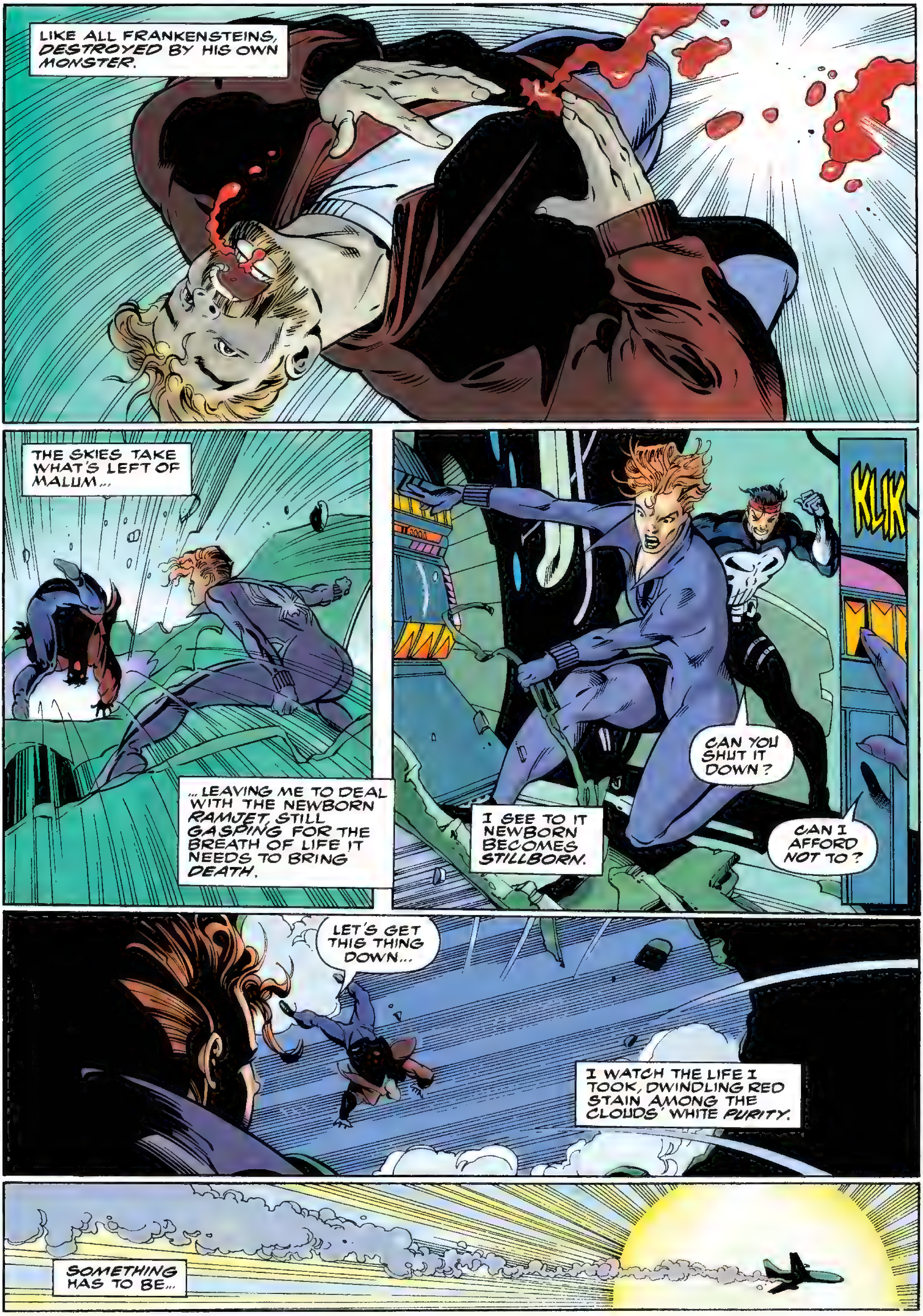
HUMAN SKIN BREAKING EASILY UNDER IMPACT.
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
KRZAAM
GET BACK!
COMIN' OUTTA THE WALLS, THEY'RE COMIN' OUTTA--
I'M HIT, I'M BLEEDING!

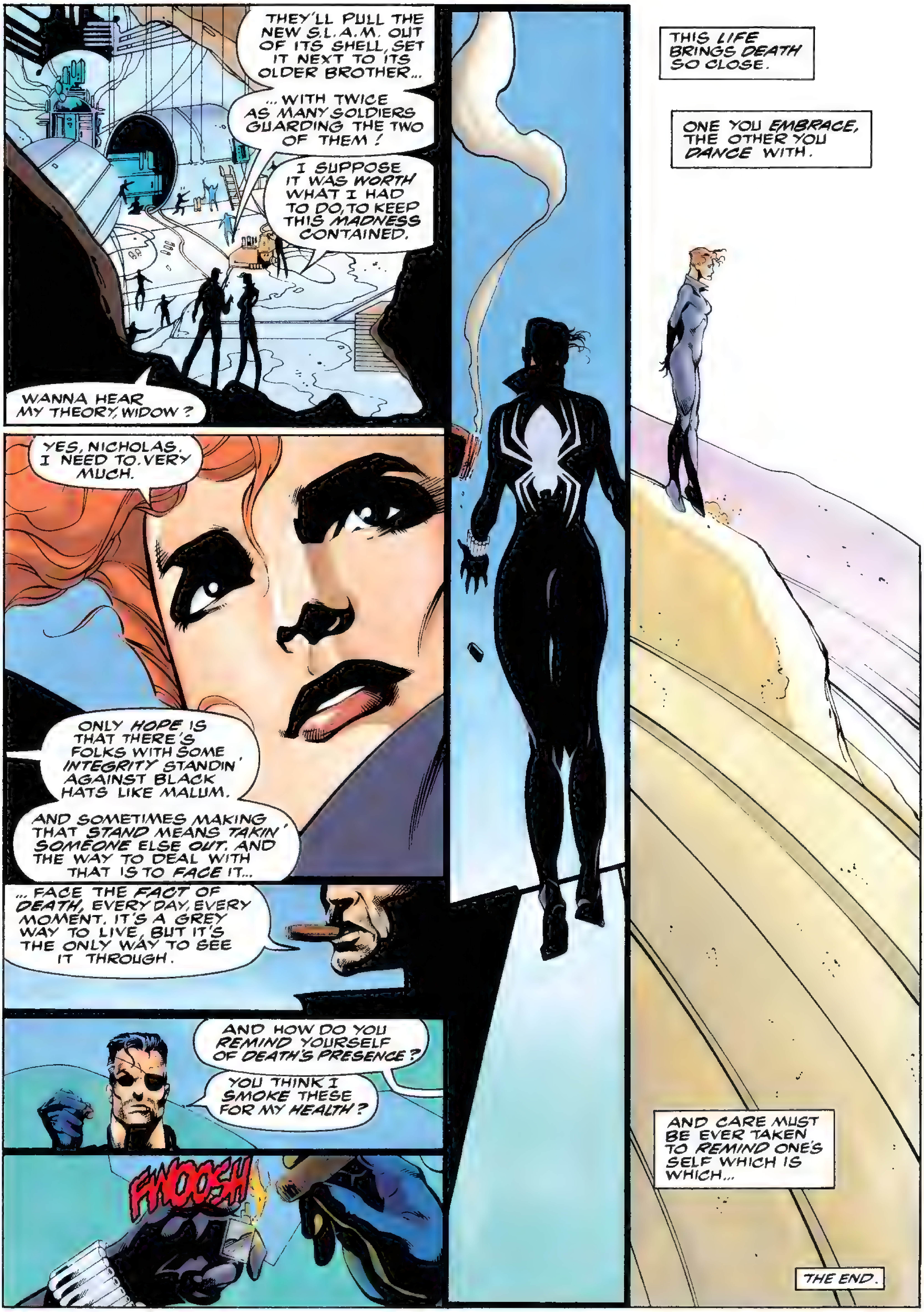

THAT'S IT, DOC, THE PARTY'S OVER!
NO, CASSADY, THERE'S STILL TIME TO MAKE THE WEAPON OPERATIONAL!
WHOA, WHOA! "OPERATIONAL"? IT'S ONLY A THREAT, REMEMBER? A BARGAINING TOOL TO GET WHAT WE WANTED!
SNKAP
WHAT YOU WANTED.
THIS IS WHAT I WANT.
I FEEL THE JET ACCELERATING AS IT RUSHES TOWARD SETTING MALUM'S NIGHTMARE LOOSE...
THIS ANIMAL.
YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE CONCERNED WITH FINISHING ME OFF THAN HUMILIATING ME!
...I FEEL THE THUNDERING ROAR OF THE BLOOD THROUGH MY VEINS AS I'M FACED OFF AGAINST THIS MAN FOR THE FINAL TIME.
YOU SHOULD'VE STAYED DOWN ON THE FOREST FLOOR WITH MY SPIT!

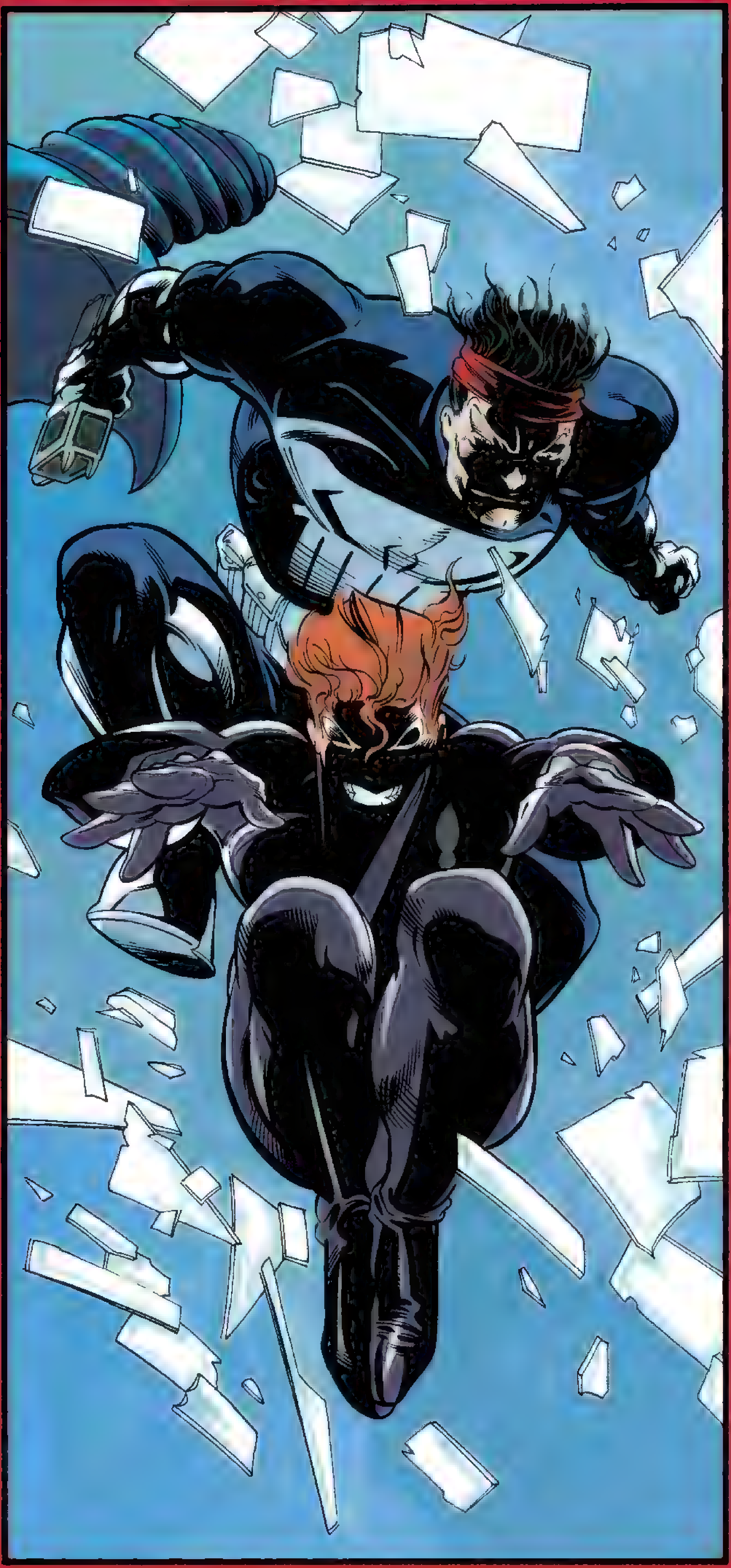

TIME TO MAKE UP FOR LOST OPPORTUNITY, I GUESS!
FWAAK
AGREED.
KRAANK
FOR A MOMENT I THINK I HAVE HIM --


--THAT I'VE *MATCHED* HIS NAKED *AGGRESSION* WITH MY OWN.
KRIIICK
MY MISTAKE IS IN FORGETTING THAT MALUM'S *FURY* IS NOT RESERVED FOR ONE WOMAN OR MAN--
CLIK
--BUT FOR *ALL.*
BRTOOM
EXPLOSIVE BOLTS FIRE ALONG THE OUTER *HULL*--
--CREATING A CRUDE *WIND TUNNEL* TO FEED THE RAMJET'S *INTAKE.*
I KNOW THIS ISN'T WHAT THEY MEAN BY A DEAD MAN'S STICK, BUT STILL!
NOT CHECKED OUT ON A BIRD THIS SIZE, BUT I'VE GOT TO BE ABLE TO DO BETTER THAN A CORPSE!


TWISTED SHRAPNEL IN MALUM'S HAND--
BRAAK
--JAGGED METAL SHORN OFF A PANEL OF HIS MISSILE'S CONTROL UNITS.
ONCE AGAIN, FROM OUT OF THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN US, THE DARK CHOICE OF SURVIVAL.
I'LL LIVE THIS DAY--
--AND DAMNATION BE THE COST.
CHUUK
THE GLEAM OF THE S.L.A.M METAL DULLS UNDER THE BLACK BLOOD, A CONDEMNATION.


LIKE ALL FRANKENSTEINS, DESTROYED BY HIS OWN MONSTER.
THE SKIES TAKE WHAT'S LEFT OF MALUM...
...LEAVING ME TO DEAL WITH THE NEWBORN RAMJET, STILL GASPING FOR THE BREATH OF LIFE IT NEEDS TO BRING DEATH.
KLIK
CAN YOU SHUT IT DOWN?
I SEE TO IT NEWBORN BECOMES STILLBORN.
CAN I AFFORD NOT TO?
LET'S GET THIS THING DOWN...
I WATCH THE LIFE I TOOK, DWINDLING RED STAIN AMONG THE CLOUDS' WHITE PURITY.
SOMETHING HAS TO BE...

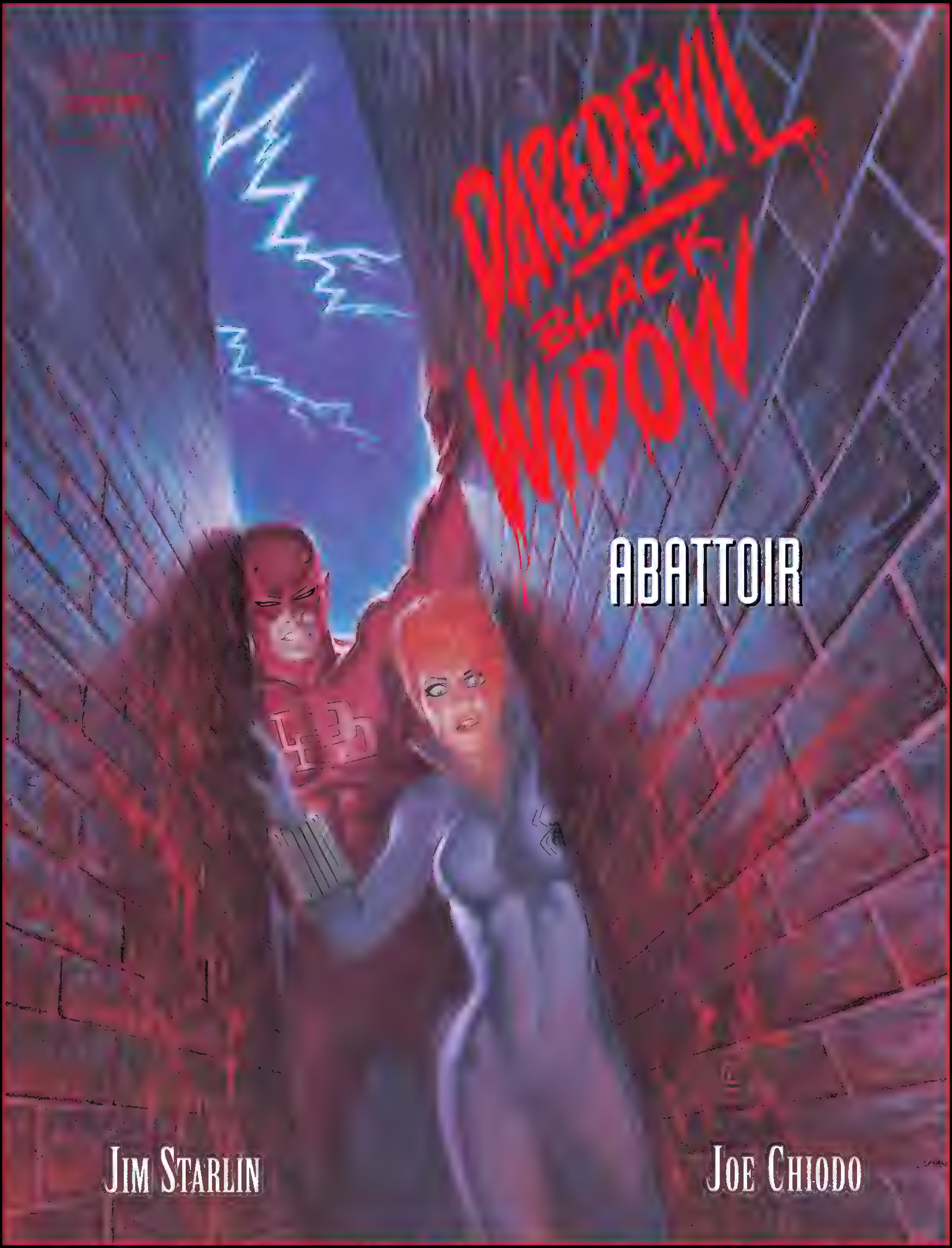

THEY'LL PULL THE NEW S.L.A.M. OUT OF ITS SHELL, SET IT NEXT TO ITS OLDER BROTHER...
...WITH TWICE AS MANY SOLDIERS GUARDING THE TWO OF THEM!
I SUPPOSE IT WAS WORTH WHAT I HAD TO DO, TO KEEP THIS MADNESS CONTAINED.
WANNA HEAR MY THEORY, WIDOW?
YES, NICHOLAS. I NEED TO, VERY MUCH.
ONLY HOPE IS THAT THERE'S FOLKS WITH SOME INTEGRITY STANDIN' AGAINST BLACK HATS LIKE MALUM.
AND SOMETIMES MAKING THAT STAND MEANS TAKIN' SOMEONE ELSE OUT. AND THE WAY TO DEAL WITH THAT IS TO FACE IT...
...FACE THE FACT OF DEATH, EVERY DAY, EVERY MOMENT. IT'S A GREY WAY TO LIVE, BUT IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SEE IT THROUGH.
AND HOW DO YOU REMIND YOURSELF OF DEATH'S PRESENCE?
YOU THINK I SMOKE THESE FOR MY HEALTH?
FWOOSH
THIS LIFE BRINGS DEATH SO CLOSE.
ONE YOU EMBRACE, THE OTHER YOU DANCE WITH.
AND CARE MUST BE EVER TAKEN TO REMIND ONE'S SELF WHICH IS WHICH...
THE END.

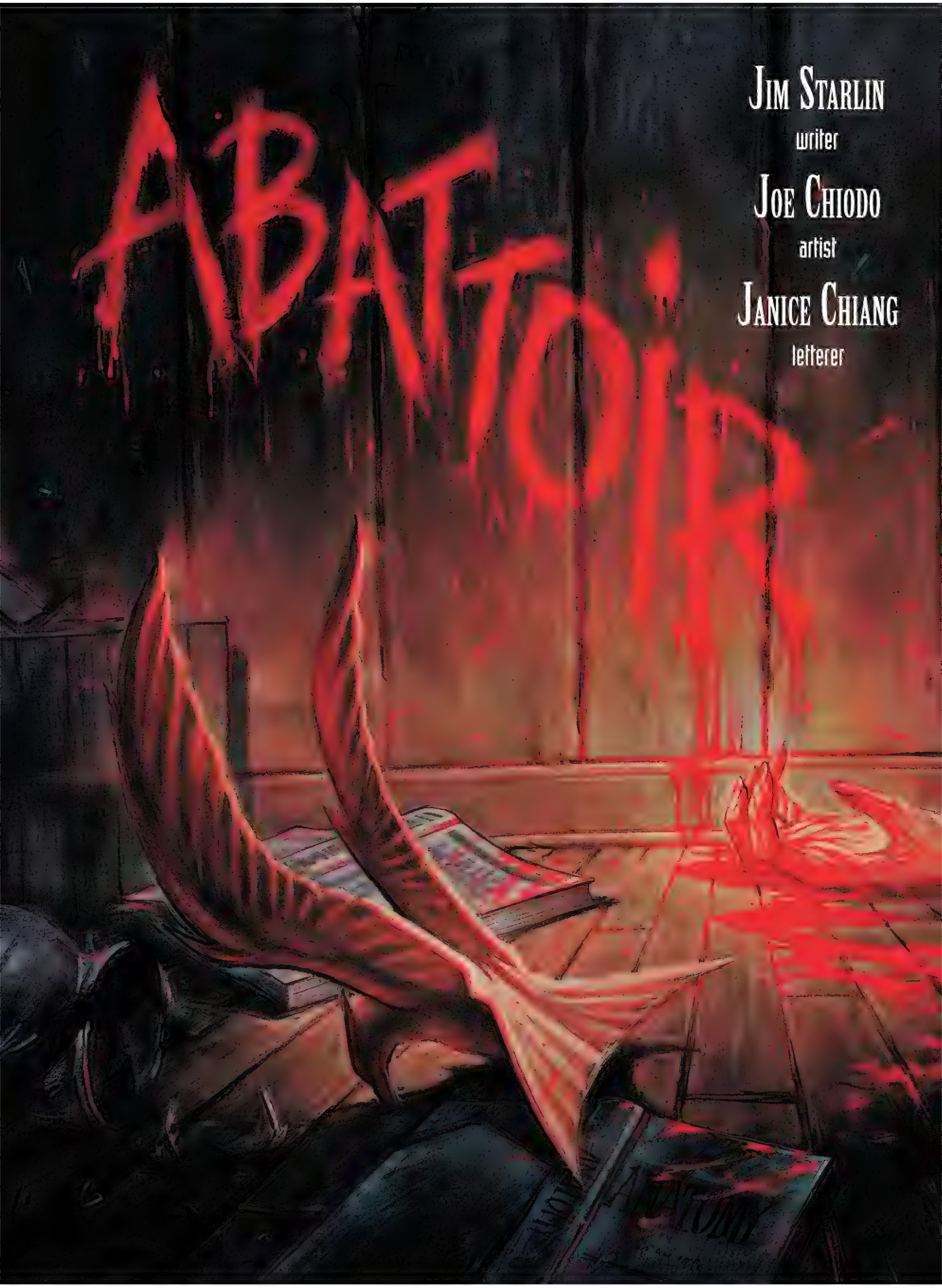


A brilliant, yet maniacal, scientific genius fervently pieces together the means to unleash total thermonuclear devastation upon the world.

All that stands in his way is the union forged by two separate forces of justice—the Punisher and the Black Widow.

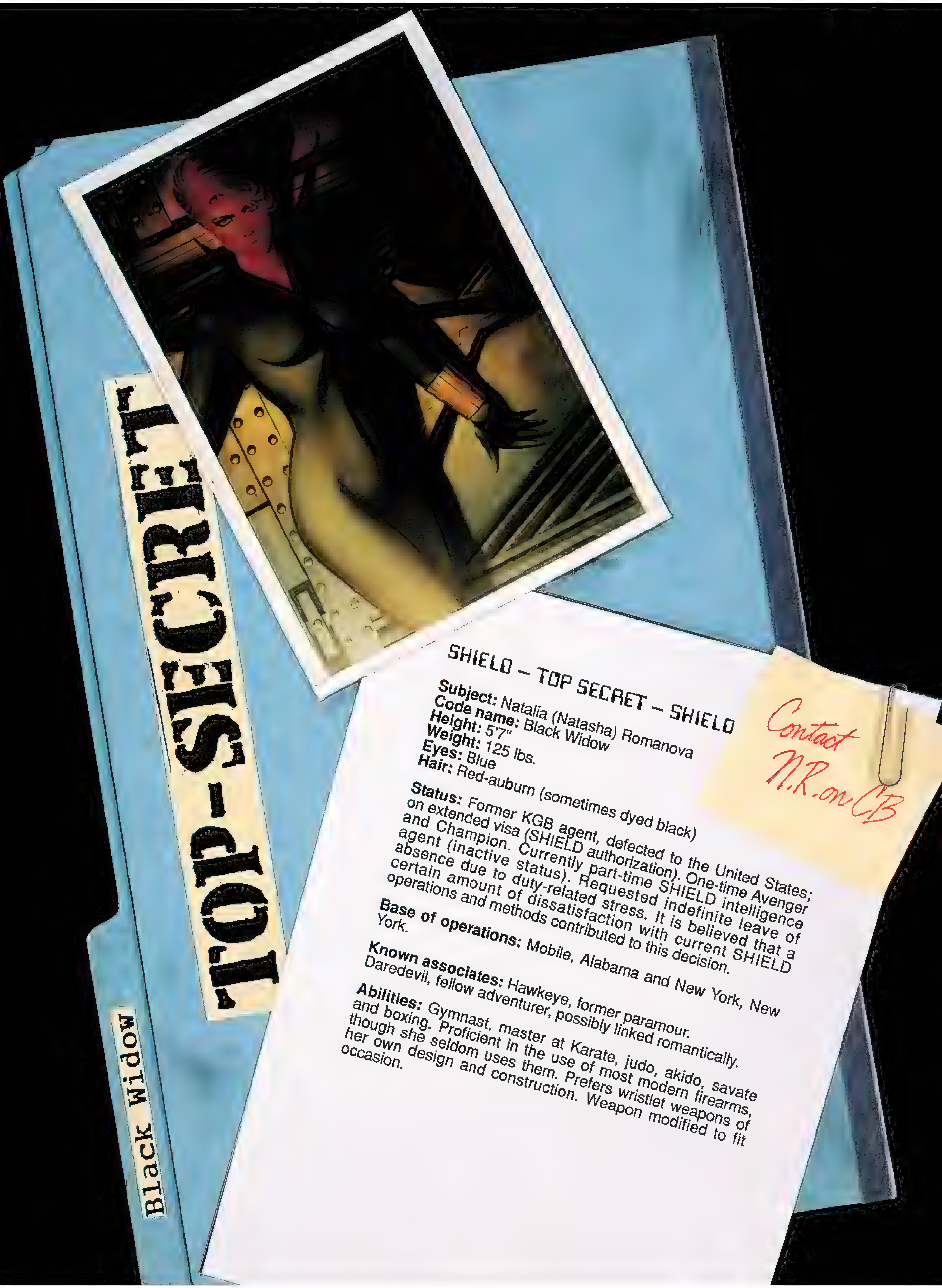
With motivations as different as their own dark pasts, the two battle side-by-side in a most unholy alliance against the deadly machinations of their mad rival.


DAREDEVIL
BLACK
WIDOW
ABATTOIR
JIM STARLIN
JOE CHIODO



ABATTOIR

JIM STARLIN
writer
JOE CHIODO
artist
JANICE CHIANG
letterer



SHIELD – TOP SECRET – SHIELD

Contact N.R. on CB

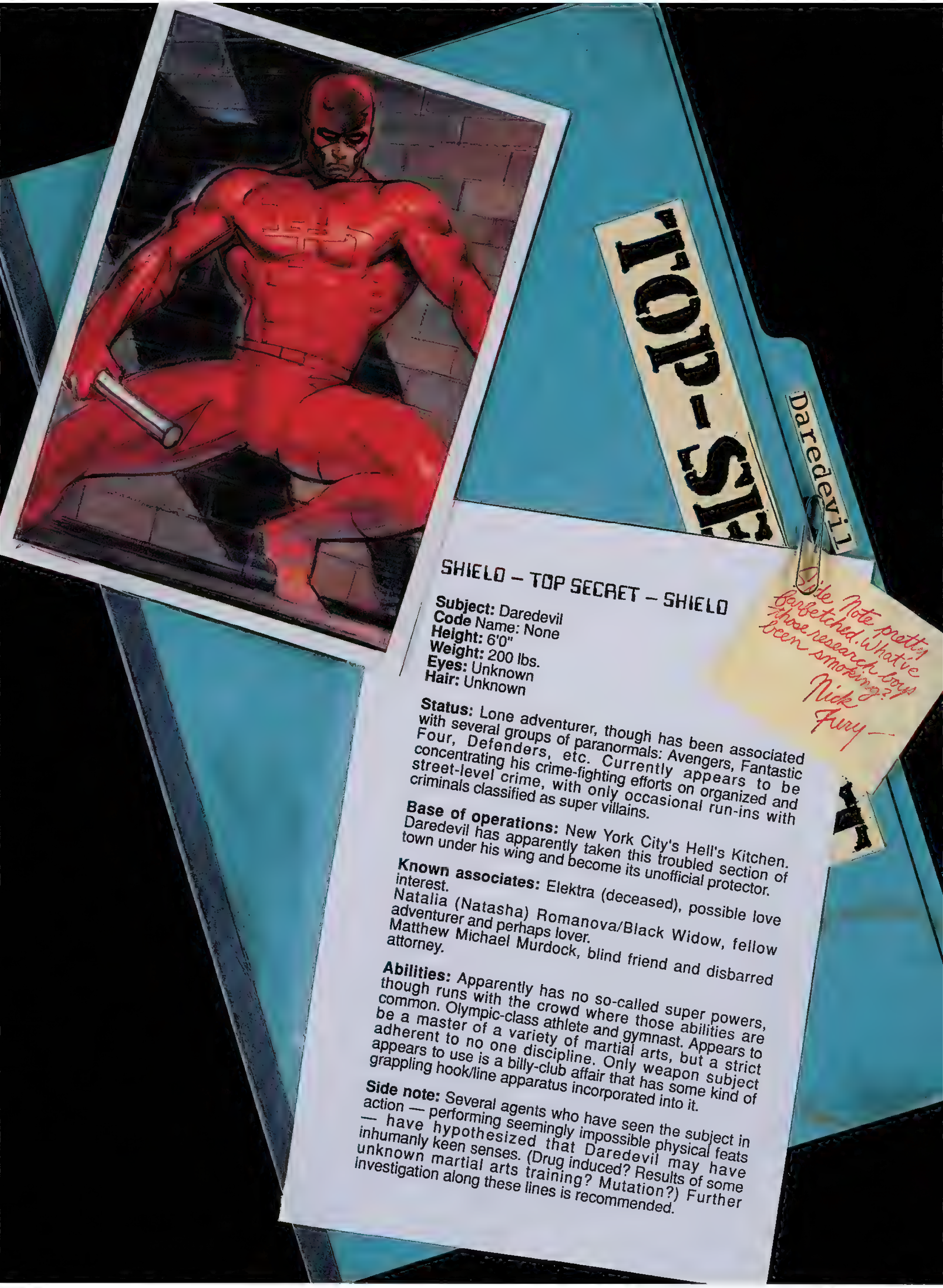
Subject: Natalia (Natasha) Romanova
Code name: Black Widow
Height: 5'7"
Weight: 125 lbs.
Eyes: Blue
Hair: Red-auburn (sometimes dyed black)

Status: Former KGB agent, defected to the United States; on extended visa (SHIELD authorization). One-time Avenger and Champion. Currently part-time SHIELD intelligence agent (inactive status). Requested indefinite leave of absence due to duty-related stress. It is believed that a certain amount of dissatisfaction with current SHIELD operations and methods contributed to this decision.

Base of operations: Mobile, Alabama and New York, New York.

Known associates: Hawkeye, former paramour. Daredevil, fellow adventurer, possibly linked romantically.

Abilities: Gymnast, master at Karate, judo, akido, savate and boxing. Proficient in the use of most modern firearms, though she seldom uses them. Prefers wristlet weapons of her own design and construction. Weapon modified to fit occasion.



SHIELD — TOP SECRET — SHIELD

Subject: Daredevil
Code Name: None
Height: 6'0"
Weight: 200 lbs.
Eyes: Unknown
Hair: Unknown

Status: Lone adventurer, though has been associated with several groups of paranormals: Avengers, Fantastic Four, Defenders, etc. Currently appears to be concentrating his crime-fighting efforts on organized and street-level crime, with only occasional run-ins with criminals classified as super villains.

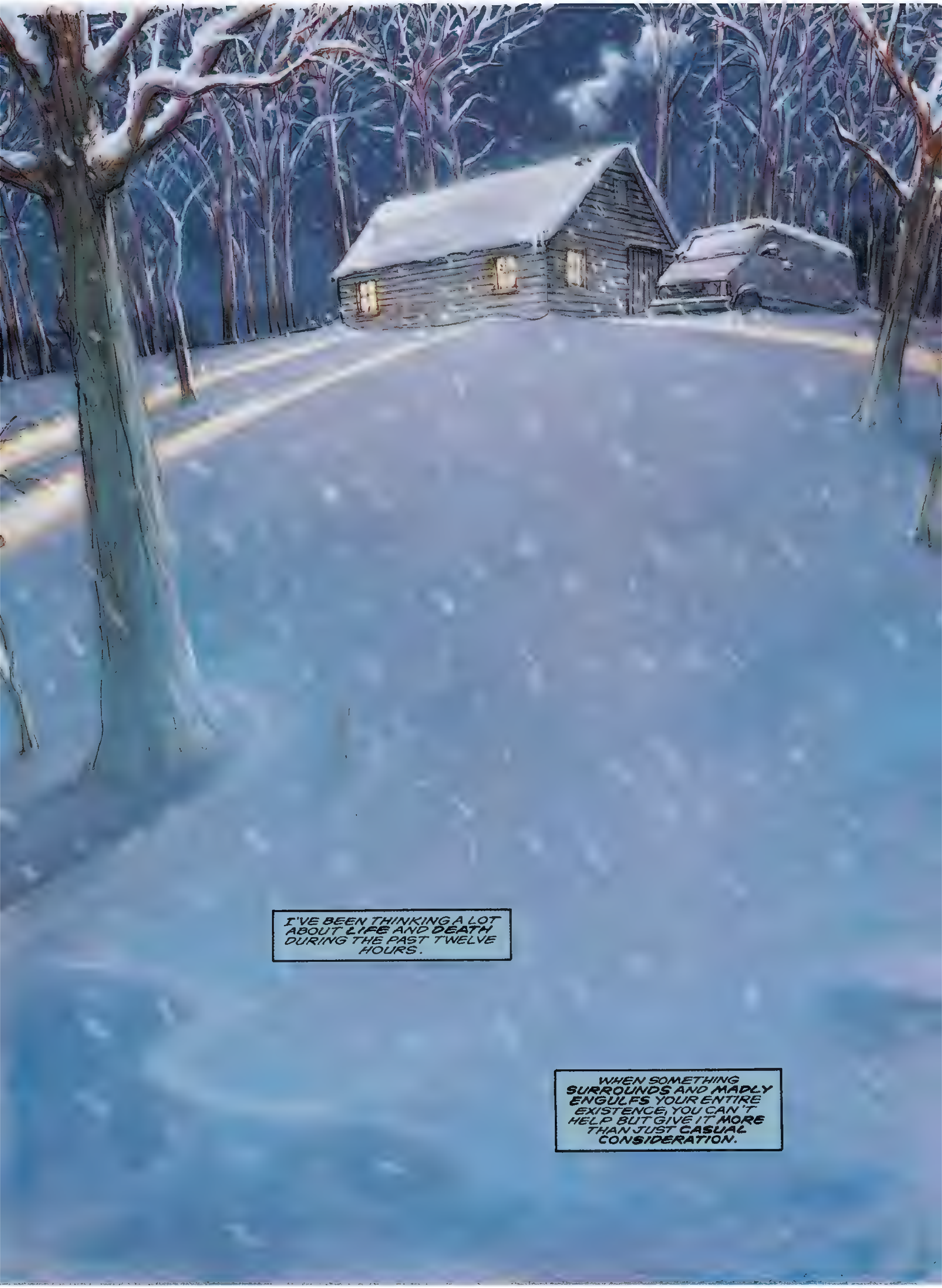
Base of operations: New York City's Hell's Kitchen. Daredevil has apparently taken this troubled section of town under his wing and become its unofficial protector.

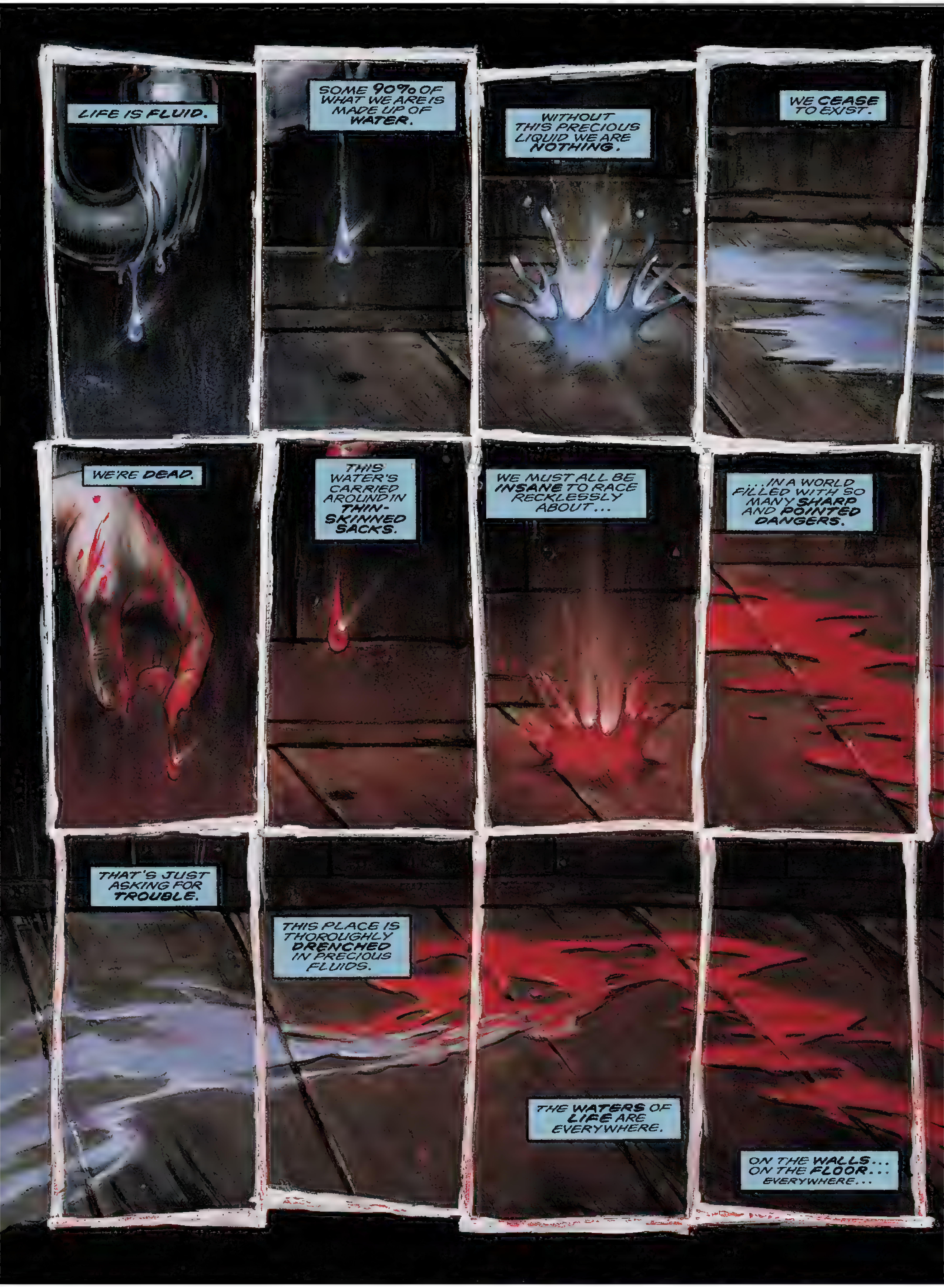
Known associates: Elektra (deceased), possible love interest.
Natalia (Natasha) Romanova/Black Widow, fellow adventurer and perhaps lover.
Matthew Michael Murdock, blind friend and disbarred attorney.

Abilities: Apparently has no so-called super powers, though runs with the crowd where those abilities are common. Olympic-class athlete and gymnast. Appears to be a master of a variety of martial arts, but a strict adherent to no one discipline. Only weapon subject appears to use is a billy-club affair that has some kind of grappling hook/line apparatus incorporated into it.

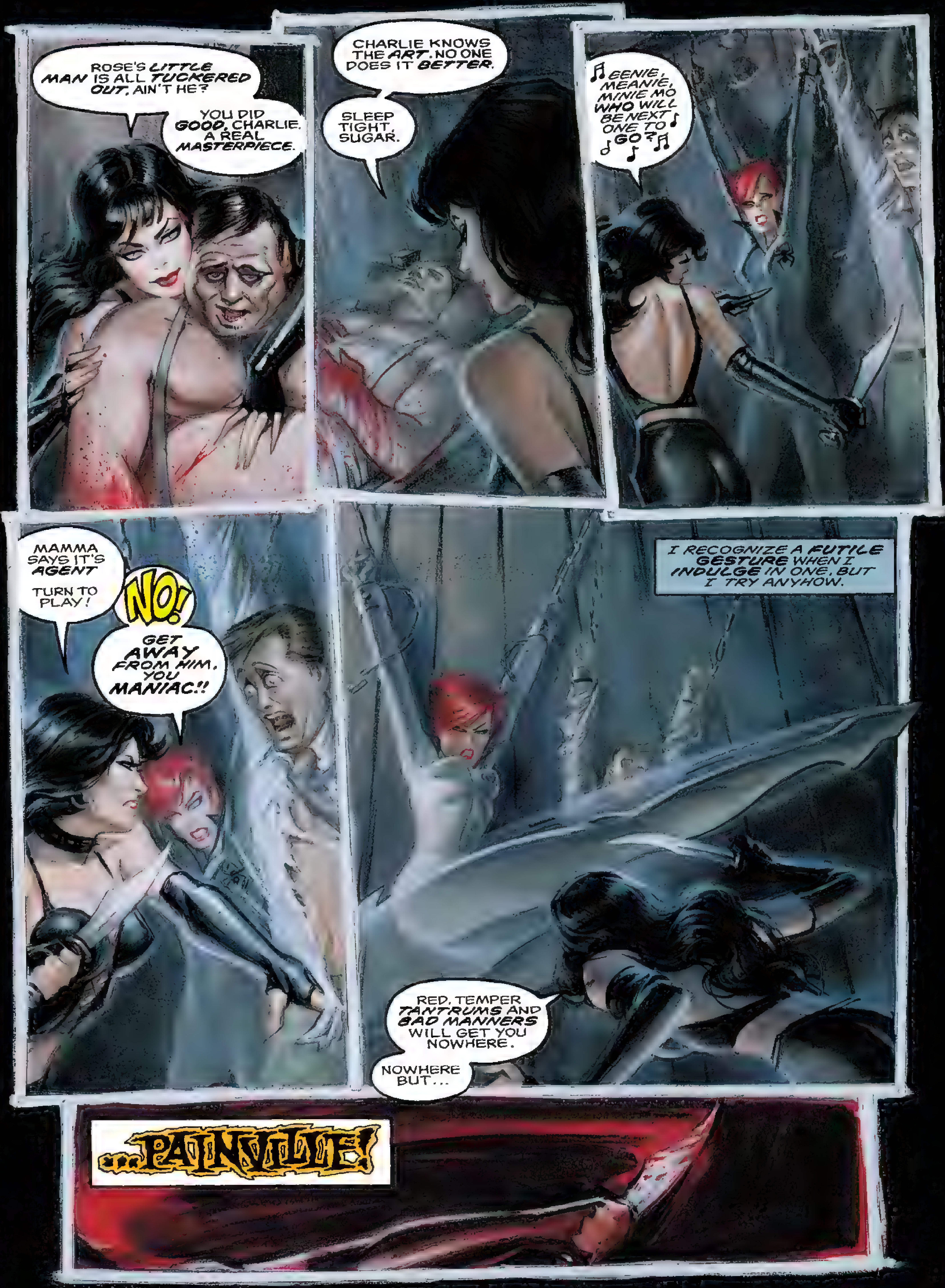
Side note: Several agents who have seen the subject in action — performing seemingly impossible physical feats — have hypothesized that Daredevil may have inhumanly keen senses. (Drug induced? Results of some unknown martial arts training? Mutation?) Further investigation along these lines is recommended.

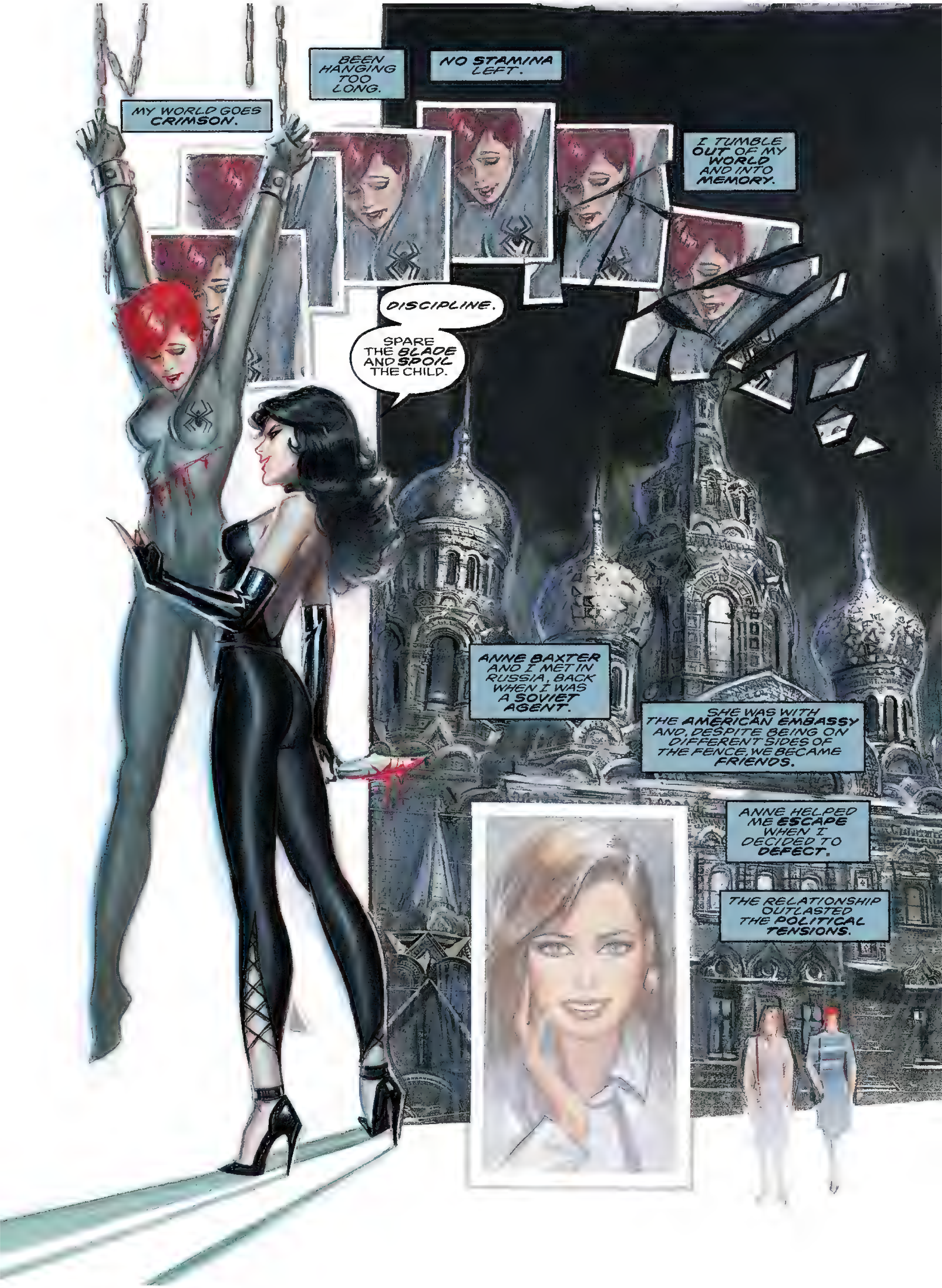
Side Note pretty farfetched. What've those research boys been smoking?!
Nick Fury —

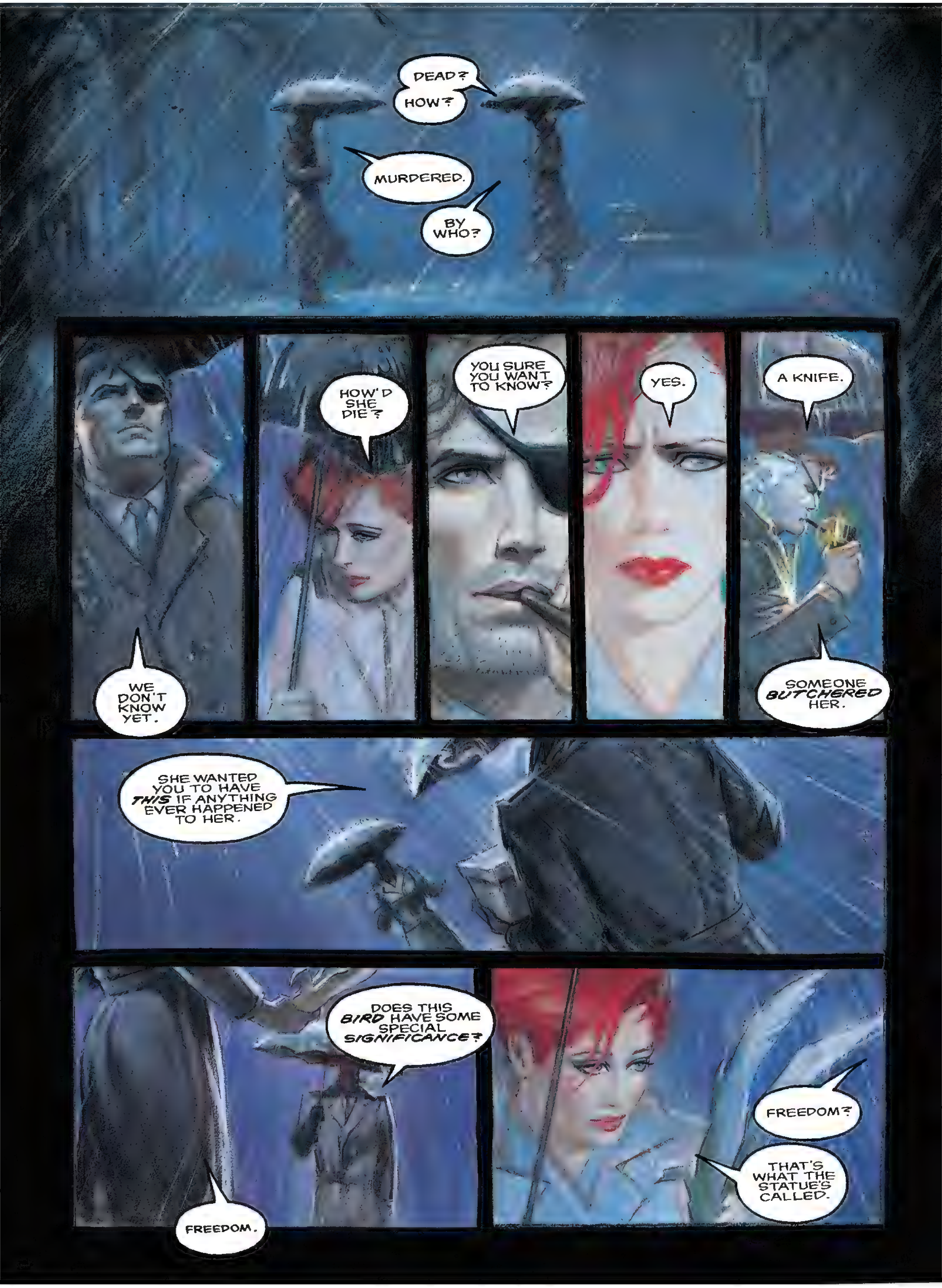

I'VE BEEN THINKING A LOT ABOUT **LIFE** AND **DEATH** DURING THE PAST TWELVE HOURS.
WHEN SOMETHING **SURROUNDS** AND **MADLY ENGULFS** YOUR ENTIRE EXISTENCE, YOU CAN'T HELP BUT GIVE IT **MORE** THAN JUST **CASUAL CONSIDERATION**.

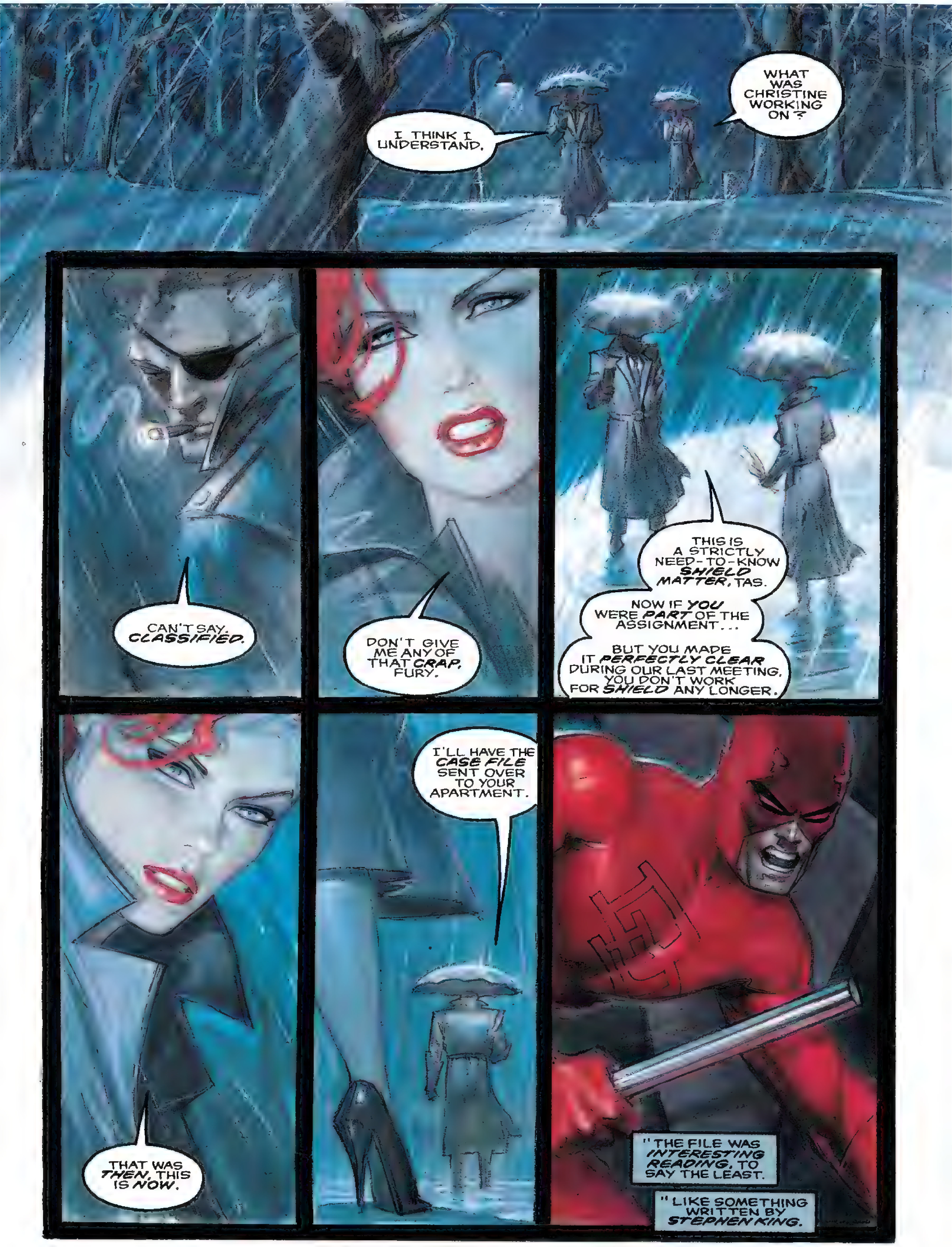

LIFE IS FLUID.
SOME 90% OF WHAT WE ARE IS MADE UP OF WATER.
WITHOUT THIS PRECIOUS LIQUID WE ARE NOTHING.
WE CEASE TO EXIST.
WE'RE DEAD.
THIS WATER'S CARRIED AROUND IN THIN-SKINNED SACKS.
WE MUST ALL BE INSANE TO RACE RECKLESSLY ABOUT...
...IN A WORLD FILLED WITH SO MANY SHARP AND POINTED DANGERS.
THAT'S JUST ASKING FOR TROUBLE.
THIS PLACE IS THOROUGHLY DRENCHED IN PRECIOUS FLUIDS.
THE WATERS OF LIFE ARE EVERYWHERE.
ON THE WALLS... ON THE FLOOR... EVERYWHERE...

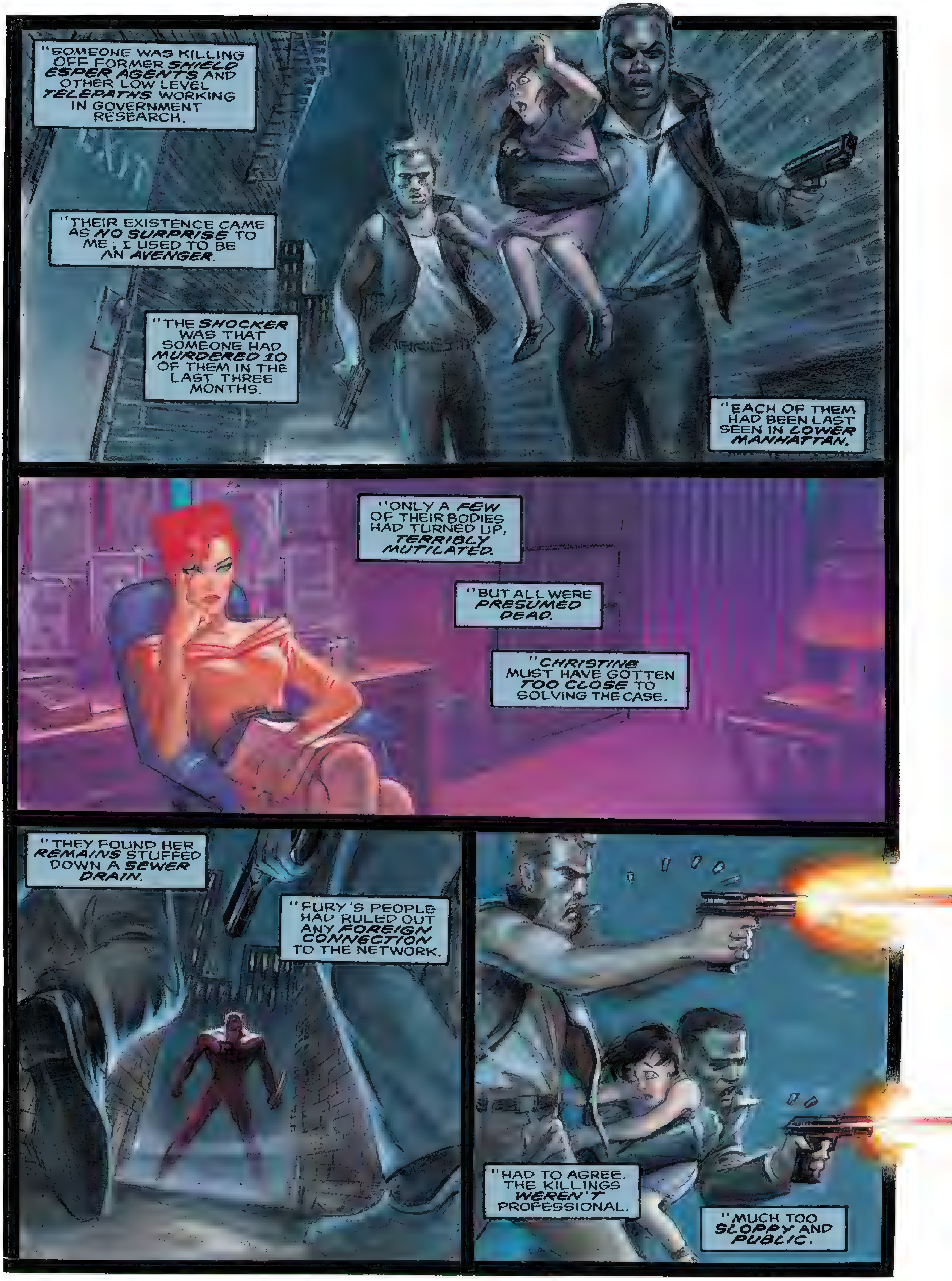
SO WHY DOES THE PLACE SMELL SO OF DEATH?
I KNOW I'M LOSING IT. CAN'T HELP IT.
IT'S JUST THAT I'VE SPENT THE LAST HALF DAY HELPLESSLY WATCHING SHIELD AGENT WILSON BEING SLOWLY AND SADISTICALLY BUTCHERED.
ALL DONE, CHARLIE HONEY?
TIME ROSIE FINALLY GOT HER LICKS IN.
I NEVER TRULY KNEW SUCH INHUMAN DEPRAVITY WAS POSSIBLE.
THAT KIND OF HORROR WARPS REALITY, MAKES YOU STUPID WITH TERROR.
IT'S THE NIGHTMARE HOUR IN ROSE'S FUN-TIME SLAUGHTERHOUSE.

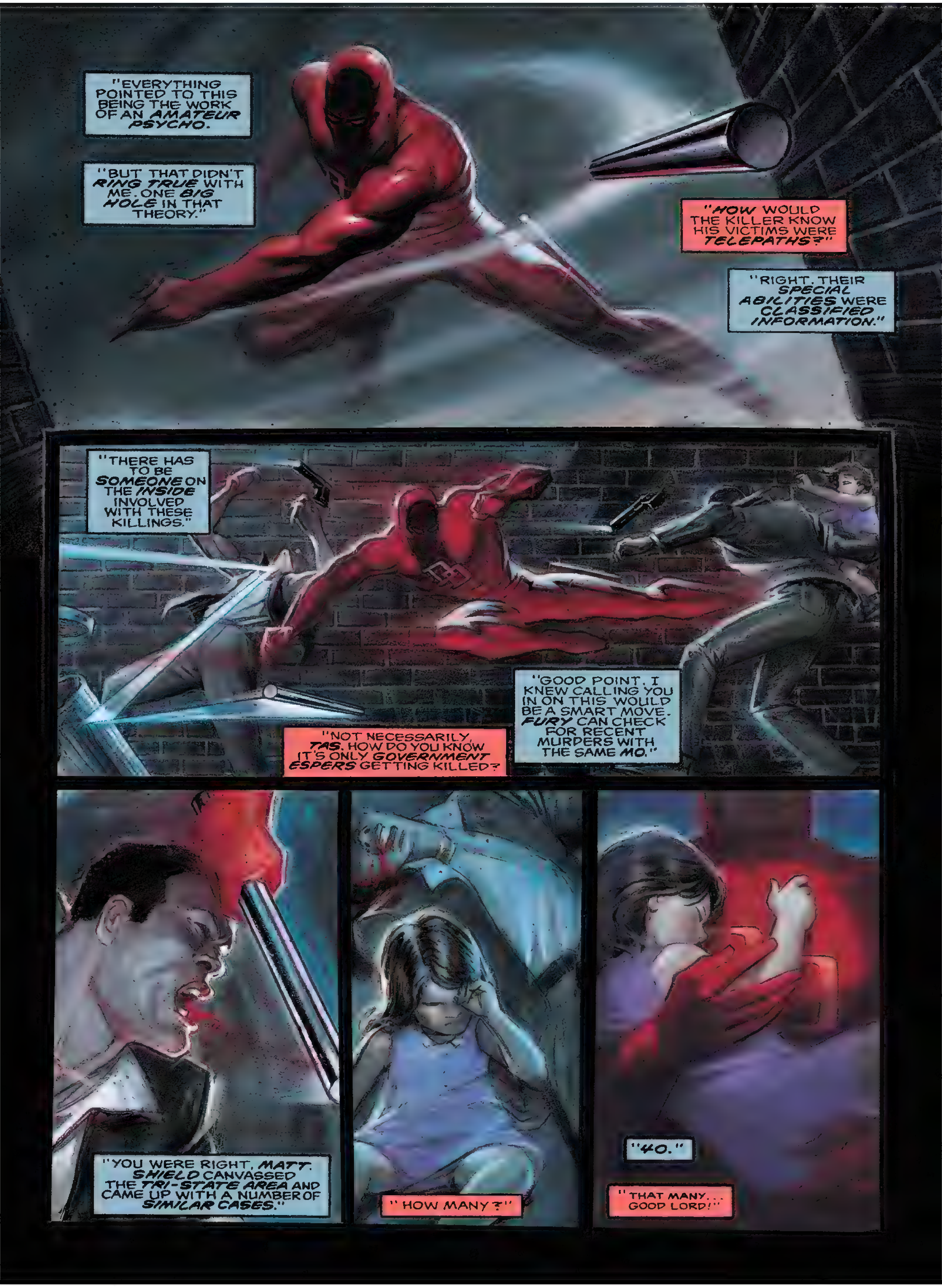

ROSE'S LITTLE MAN IS ALL TUCKERED OUT, AIN'T HE?
YOU DID GOOD, CHARLIE. A REAL MASTERPIECE.
CHARLIE KNOWS THE ART. NO ONE DOES IT BETTER.
SLEEP TIGHT, SUGAR.
♫ EENIE, MEANIE, MINIE MO WHO WILL BE NEXT ♪ ONE TO ♪ GO? ♫
MAMMA SAYS IT'S AGENT TURN TO PLAY!
NO!
GET AWAY FROM HIM, YOU MANIAC!!
I RECOGNIZE A FUTILE GESTURE WHEN I INDULGE IN ONE. BUT I TRY ANYHOW.
RED, TEMPER TANTRUMS AND BAD MANNERS WILL GET YOU NOWHERE.
NOWHERE BUT...
...PAINVILLE!

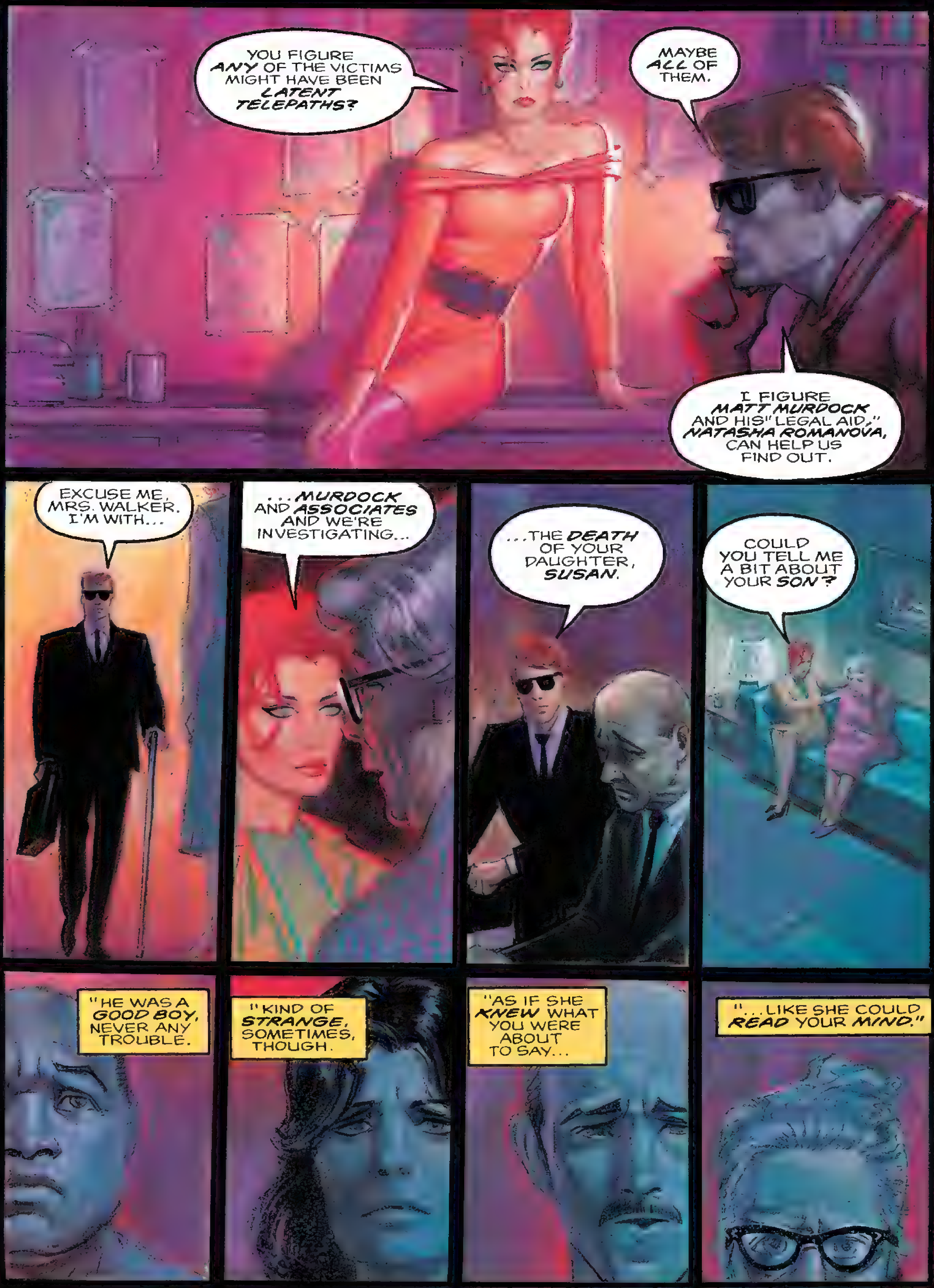

MY WORLD GOES CRIMSON.
BEEN HANGING TOO LONG.
NO STAMINA LEFT.
I TUMBLE OUT OF MY WORLD AND INTO MEMORY.
DISCIPLINE.
SPARE THE BLADE AND SPOIL THE CHILD.
ANNE BAXTER AND I MET IN RUSSIA, BACK WHEN I WAS A SOVIET AGENT.
SHE WAS WITH THE AMERICAN EMBASSY AND, DESPITE BEING ON DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE FENCE, WE BECAME FRIENDS.
ANNE HELPED ME ESCAPE WHEN I DECIDED TO DEFECT.
THE RELATIONSHIP OUTLASTED THE POLITICAL TENSIONS.

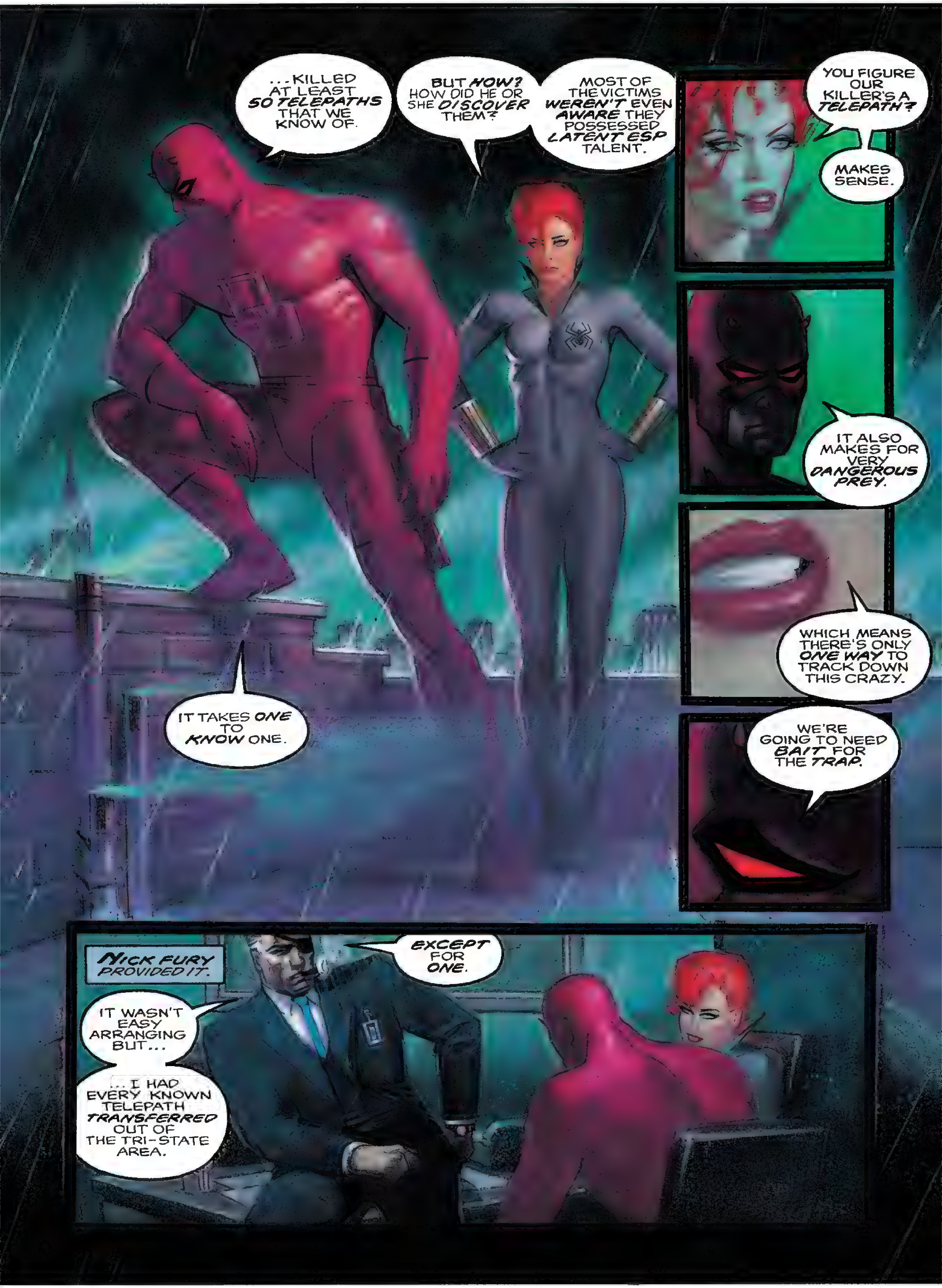

DEAD?
HOW?
MURDERED.
BY WHO?
WE DON'T KNOW YET.
HOW'D SHE DIE?
YOU SURE YOU WANT TO KNOW?
YES.
A KNIFE.
SOMEONE *BUTCHERED* HER.
SHE WANTED YOU TO HAVE *THIS* IF ANYTHING EVER HAPPENED TO HER.
DOES THIS *BIRD* HAVE SOME SPECIAL *SIGNIFICANCE?*
FREEDOM.
FREEDOM?
THAT'S WHAT THE STATUE'S CALLED.

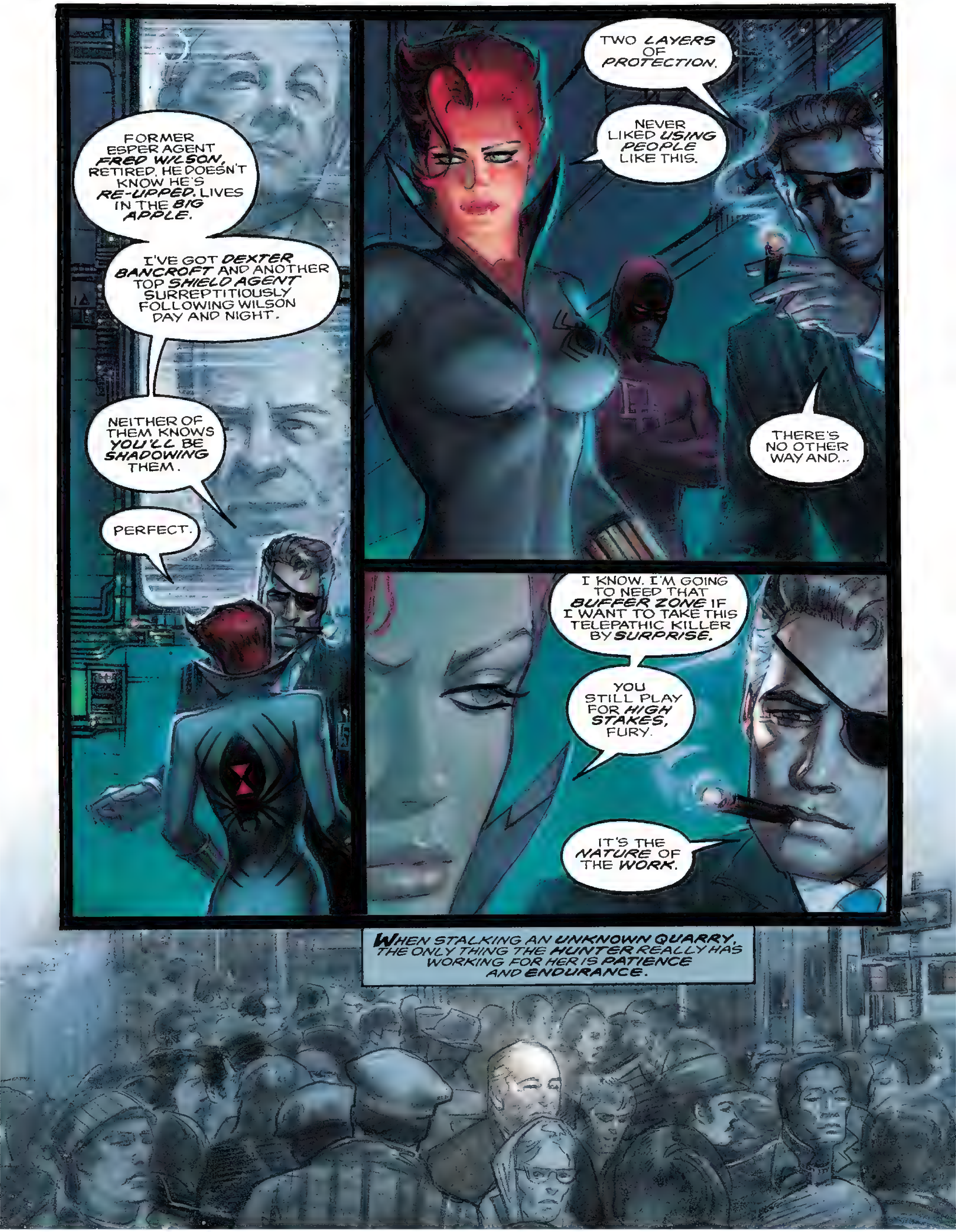

I THINK I UNDERSTAND.
WHAT WAS CHRISTINE WORKING ON?
CAN'T SAY. *CLASSIFIED.*
DON'T GIVE ME ANY OF THAT *CRAP,* FURY.
THIS IS A STRICTLY NEED-TO-KNOW *SHIELD MATTER,* TAS.
NOW IF *YOU* WERE *PART* OF THE ASSIGNMENT...
BUT YOU MADE IT *PERFECTLY CLEAR* DURING OUR LAST MEETING, YOU DON'T WORK FOR *SHIELD* ANY LONGER.
THAT WAS *THEN,* THIS IS *NOW.*
I'LL HAVE THE *CASE FILE* SENT OVER TO YOUR APARTMENT.
"THE FILE WAS *INTERESTING READING,* TO SAY THE LEAST.
"LIKE SOMETHING WRITTEN BY *STEPHEN KING.*

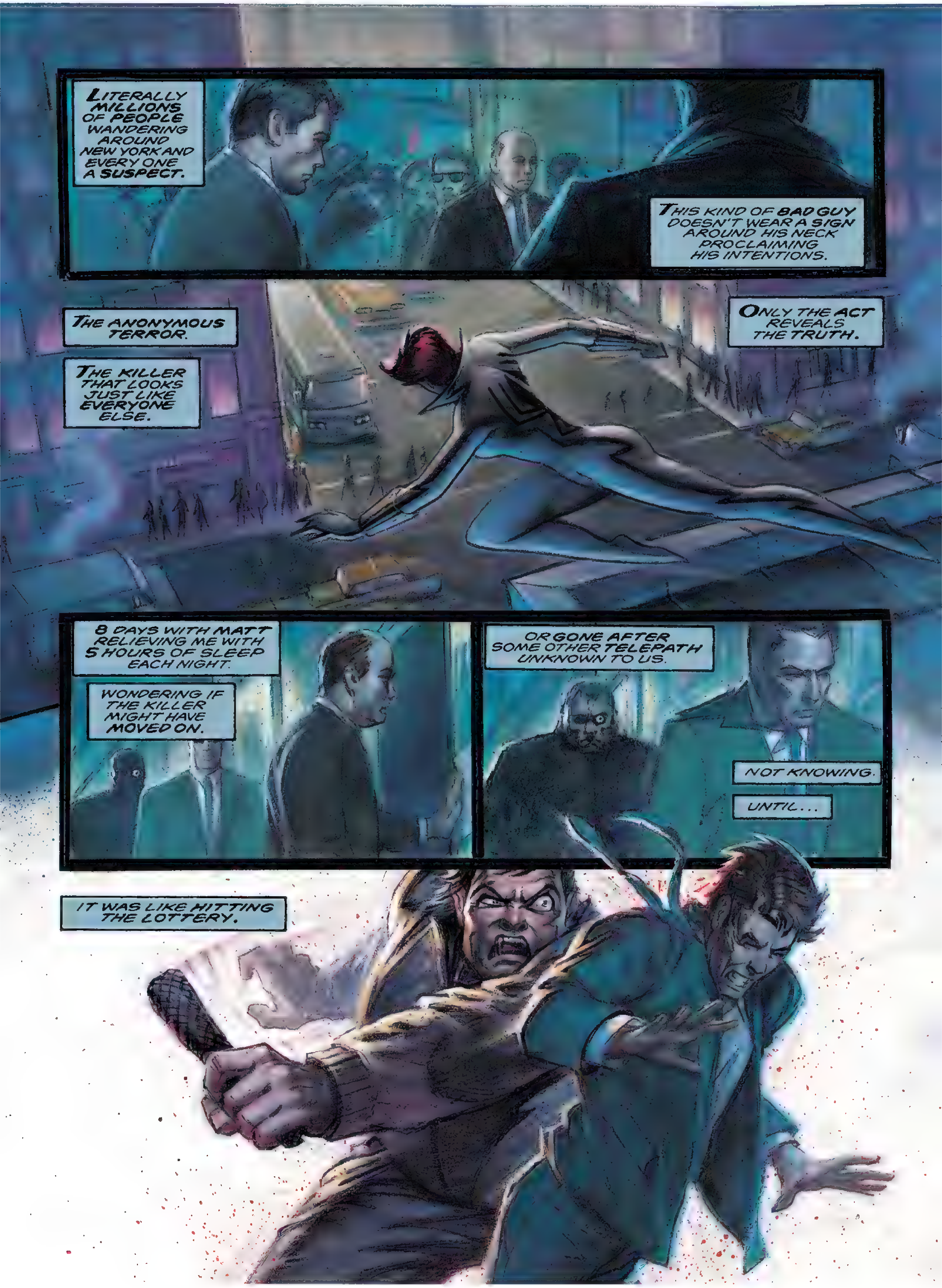

"SOMEONE WAS KILLING OFF FORMER *SHIELD ESPER AGENTS* AND OTHER LOW LEVEL *TELEPATHS* WORKING IN GOVERNMENT RESEARCH.
"THEIR EXISTENCE CAME AS *NO SURPRISE* TO ME ; I USED TO BE AN *AVENGER*.
"THE *SHOCKER* WAS THAT SOMEONE HAD *MURDERED 10* OF THEM IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS.
"EACH OF THEM HAD BEEN LAST SEEN IN *LOWER MANHATTAN*.
"ONLY A *FEW* OF THEIR BODIES HAD TURNED UP, *TERRIBLY MUTILATED*.
"BUT ALL WERE *PRESUMED DEAD*.
"*CHRISTINE* MUST HAVE GOTTEN *TOO CLOSE* TO SOLVING THE CASE.
"THEY FOUND HER *REMAINS* STUFFED DOWN A *SEWER DRAIN*.
"FURY'S PEOPLE HAD RULED OUT ANY *FOREIGN CONNECTION* TO THE NETWORK.
"HAD TO AGREE. THE KILLINGS *WEREN'T* PROFESSIONAL.
"MUCH TOO *SLOPPY* AND *PUBLIC*.

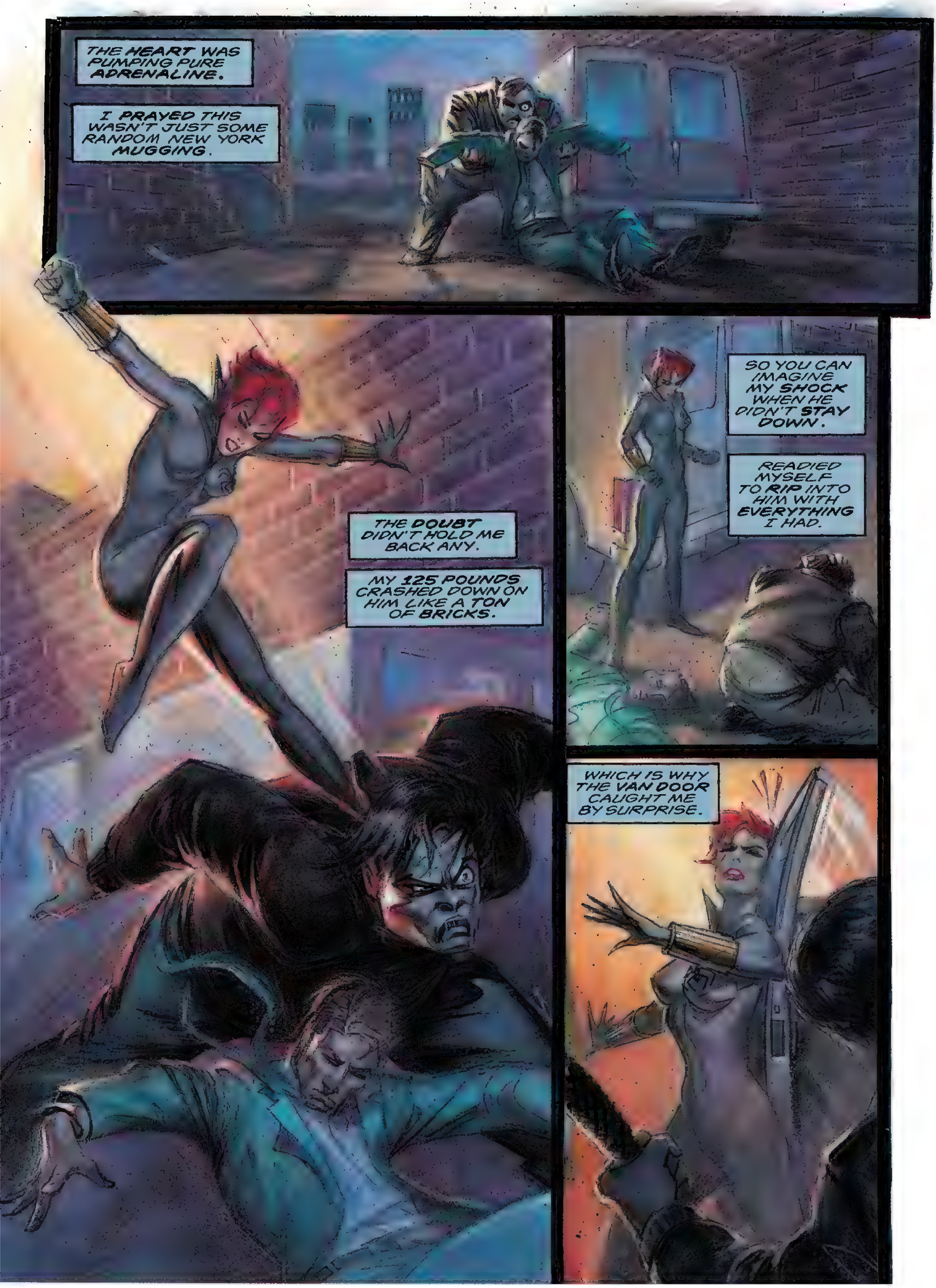

"EVERYTHING POINTED TO THIS BEING THE WORK OF AN *AMATEUR PSYCHO.*
"BUT THAT DIDN'T *RING TRUE* WITH ME. ONE *BIG HOLE* IN THAT THEORY."
"*HOW* WOULD THE KILLER KNOW HIS VICTIMS WERE *TELEPATHS?*"
"RIGHT. THEIR *SPECIAL ABILITIES* WERE *CLASSIFIED INFORMATION.*"
"THERE HAS TO BE *SOMEONE* ON THE *INSIDE* INVOLVED WITH THESE KILLINGS."
"NOT NECESSARILY, *TAS.* HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S ONLY *GOVERNMENT ESPERS* GETTING KILLED?
"GOOD POINT. I KNEW CALLING YOU IN ON THIS WOULD BE A SMART MOVE. *FURY* CAN CHECK FOR RECENT MURDERS WITH THE SAME *MO.*"
"YOU WERE RIGHT, *MATT. SHIELD* CANVASSED THE *TRI-STATE AREA* AND CAME UP WITH A NUMBER OF *SIMILAR CASES.*"
"HOW MANY?"
"40."
"THAT MANY... GOOD LORD!"

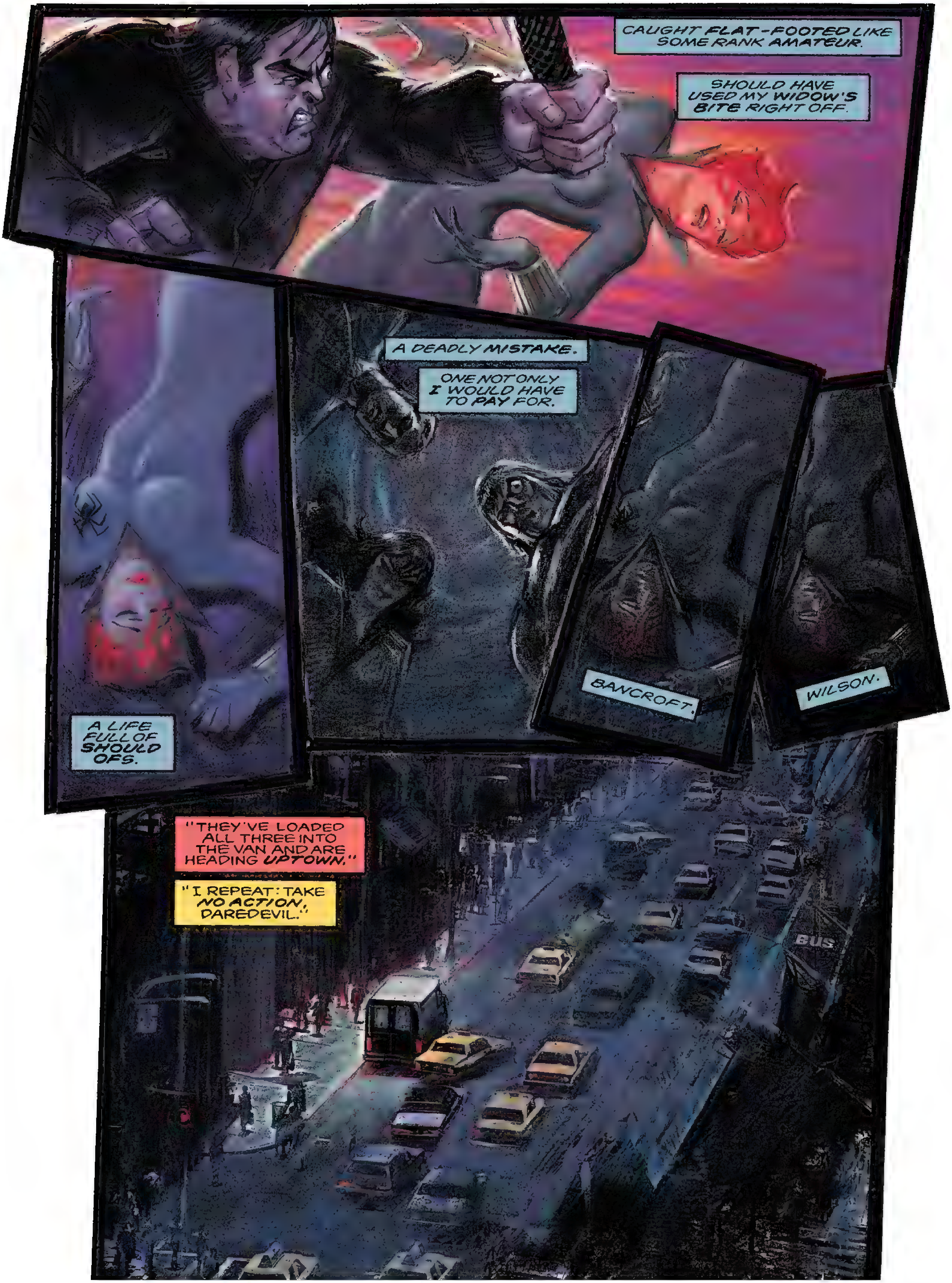

YOU FIGURE *ANY* OF THE VICTIMS MIGHT HAVE BEEN *LATENT TELEPATHS?*
MAYBE *ALL* OF THEM.
I FIGURE *MATT MURDOCK* AND HIS "LEGAL AID," *NATASHA ROMANOVA,* CAN HELP US FIND OUT.
EXCUSE ME, MRS. WALKER. I'M WITH...
...*MURDOCK* AND *ASSOCIATES* AND WE'RE INVESTIGATING...
...THE *DEATH* OF YOUR DAUGHTER, *SUSAN.*
COULD YOU TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOUR *SON?*
"HE WAS A *GOOD BOY,* NEVER ANY TROUBLE.
"KIND OF *STRANGE,* SOMETIMES, THOUGH.
"AS IF SHE *KNEW* WHAT YOU WERE ABOUT TO SAY...
"...LIKE SHE COULD *READ* YOUR *MIND.*"

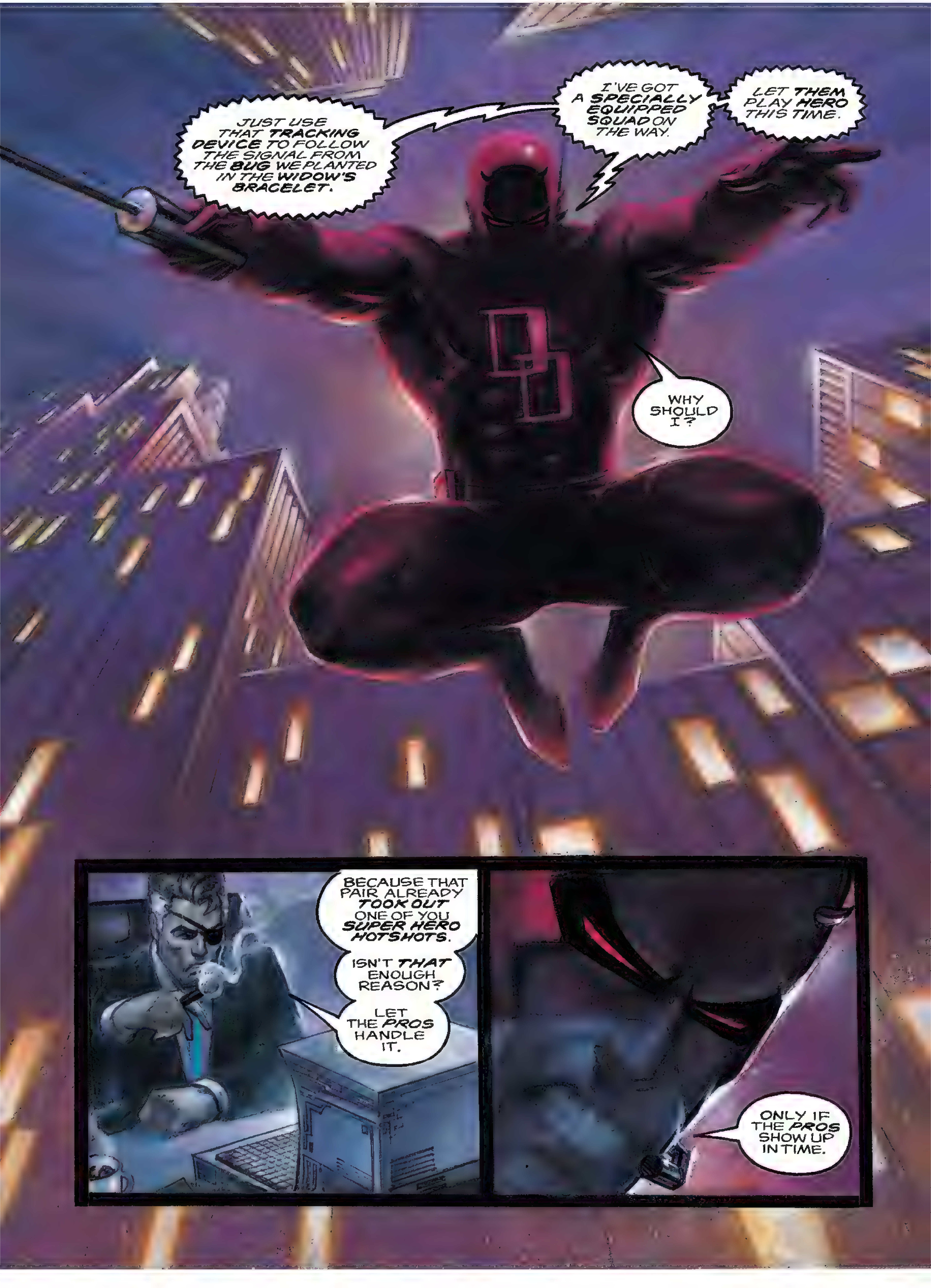

...KILLED AT LEAST *50 TELEPATHS* THAT WE KNOW OF.
BUT *HOW?* HOW DID HE OR SHE *DISCOVER* THEM?
MOST OF THE VICTIMS *WEREN'T* EVEN *AWARE* THEY POSSESSED *LATENT ESP* TALENT.
YOU FIGURE OUR KILLER'S A *TELEPATH?*
MAKES SENSE.
IT ALSO MAKES FOR VERY *DANGEROUS PREY.*
WHICH MEANS THERE'S ONLY *ONE WAY* TO TRACK DOWN THIS CRAZY.
WE'RE GOING TO NEED *BAIT* FOR THE *TRAP.*
IT TAKES *ONE* TO *KNOW* ONE.
NICK FURY PROVIDED IT.
IT WASN'T EASY ARRANGING BUT...
...I HAD EVERY KNOWN TELEPATH *TRANSFERRED* OUT OF THE TRI-STATE AREA.
EXCEPT FOR *ONE.*

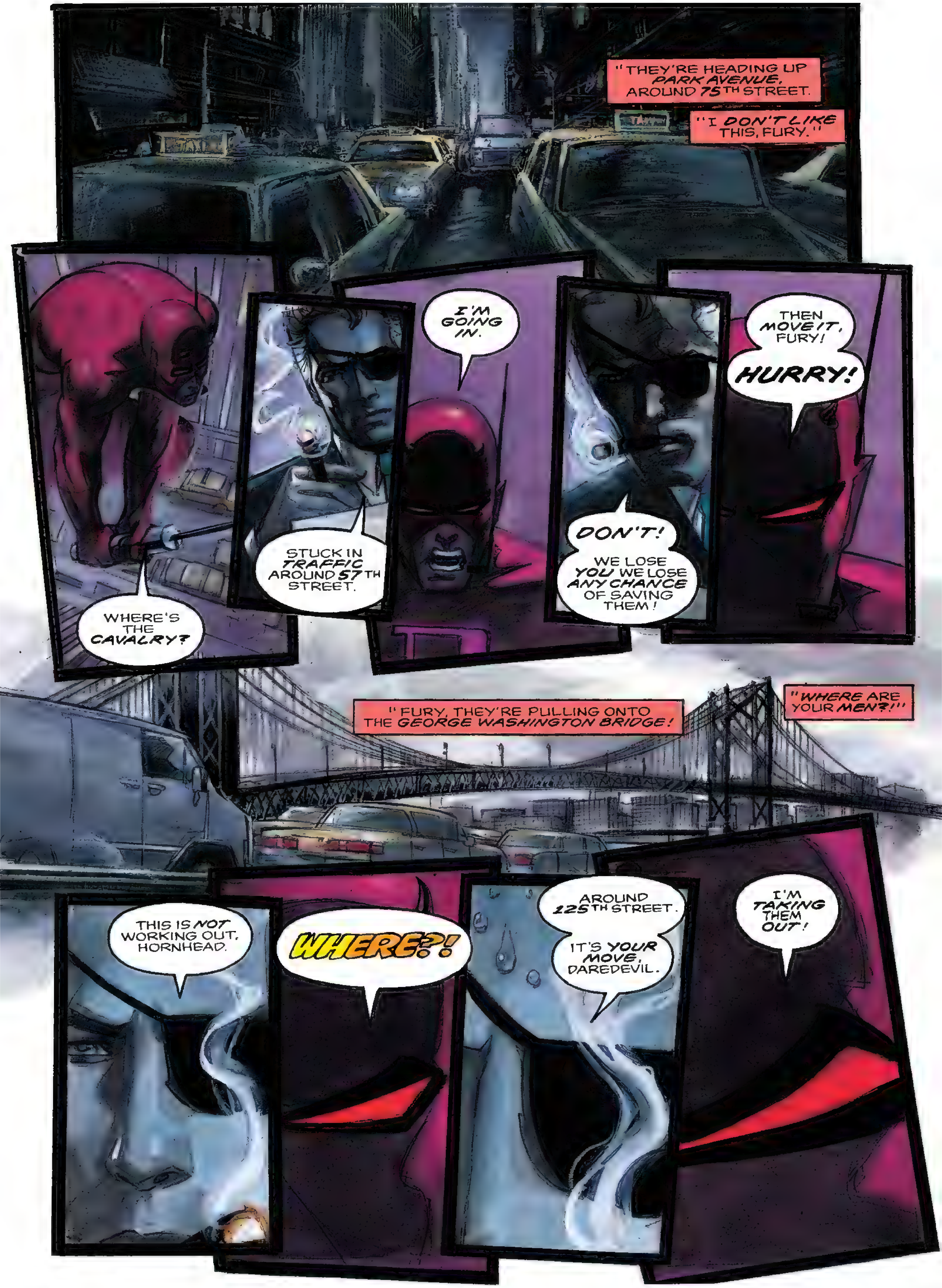

FORMER ESPER AGENT FRED WILSON, RETIRED. HE DOESN'T KNOW HE'S RE-UPPED. LIVES IN THE BIG APPLE.
I'VE GOT DEXTER BANCROFT AND ANOTHER TOP SHIELD AGENT SURREPTITIOUSLY FOLLOWING WILSON DAY AND NIGHT.
NEITHER OF THEM KNOWS YOU'LL BE SHADOWING THEM.
PERFECT.
TWO LAYERS OF PROTECTION.
NEVER LIKED USING PEOPLE LIKE THIS.
THERE'S NO OTHER WAY AND...
I KNOW. I'M GOING TO NEED THAT BUFFER ZONE IF I WANT TO TAKE THIS TELEPATHIC KILLER BY SURPRISE.
YOU STILL PLAY FOR HIGH STAKES, FURY.
IT'S THE NATURE OF THE WORK.
WHEN STALKING AN UNKNOWN QUARRY, THE ONLY THING THE HUNTER REALLY HAS WORKING FOR HER IS PATIENCE AND ENDURANCE.

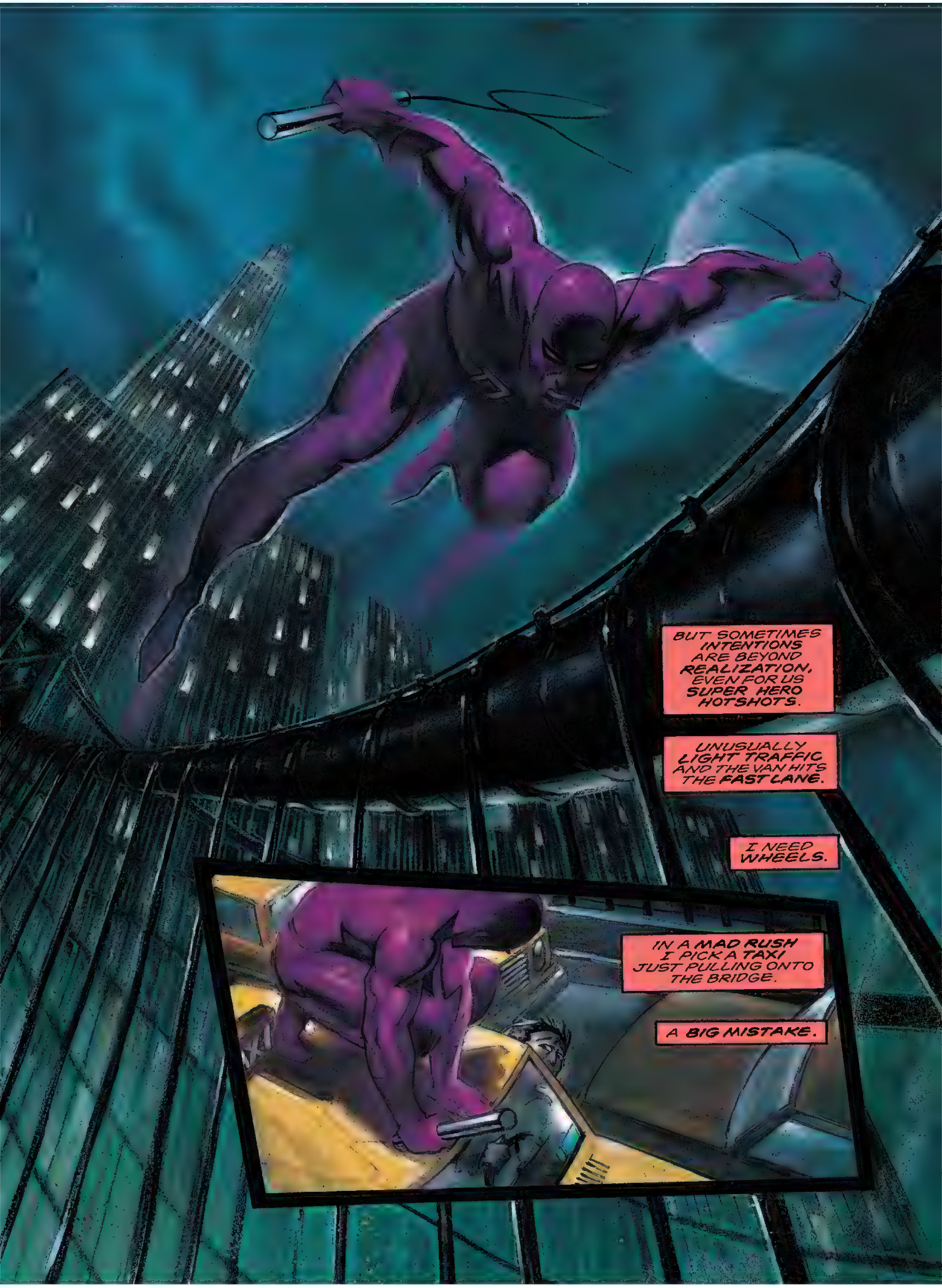

LITERALLY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WANDERING AROUND NEW YORK AND EVERY ONE A SUSPECT.
THIS KIND OF BAD GUY DOESN'T WEAR A SIGN AROUND HIS NECK PROCLAIMING HIS INTENTIONS.
THE ANONYMOUS TERROR.
THE KILLER THAT LOOKS JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.
ONLY THE ACT REVEALS THE TRUTH.
8 DAYS WITH MATT RELIEVING ME WITH 5 HOURS OF SLEEP EACH NIGHT.
WONDERING IF THE KILLER MIGHT HAVE MOVED ON.
OR GONE AFTER SOME OTHER TELEPATH UNKNOWN TO US.
NOT KNOWING.
UNTIL...
IT WAS LIKE HITTING THE LOTTERY.

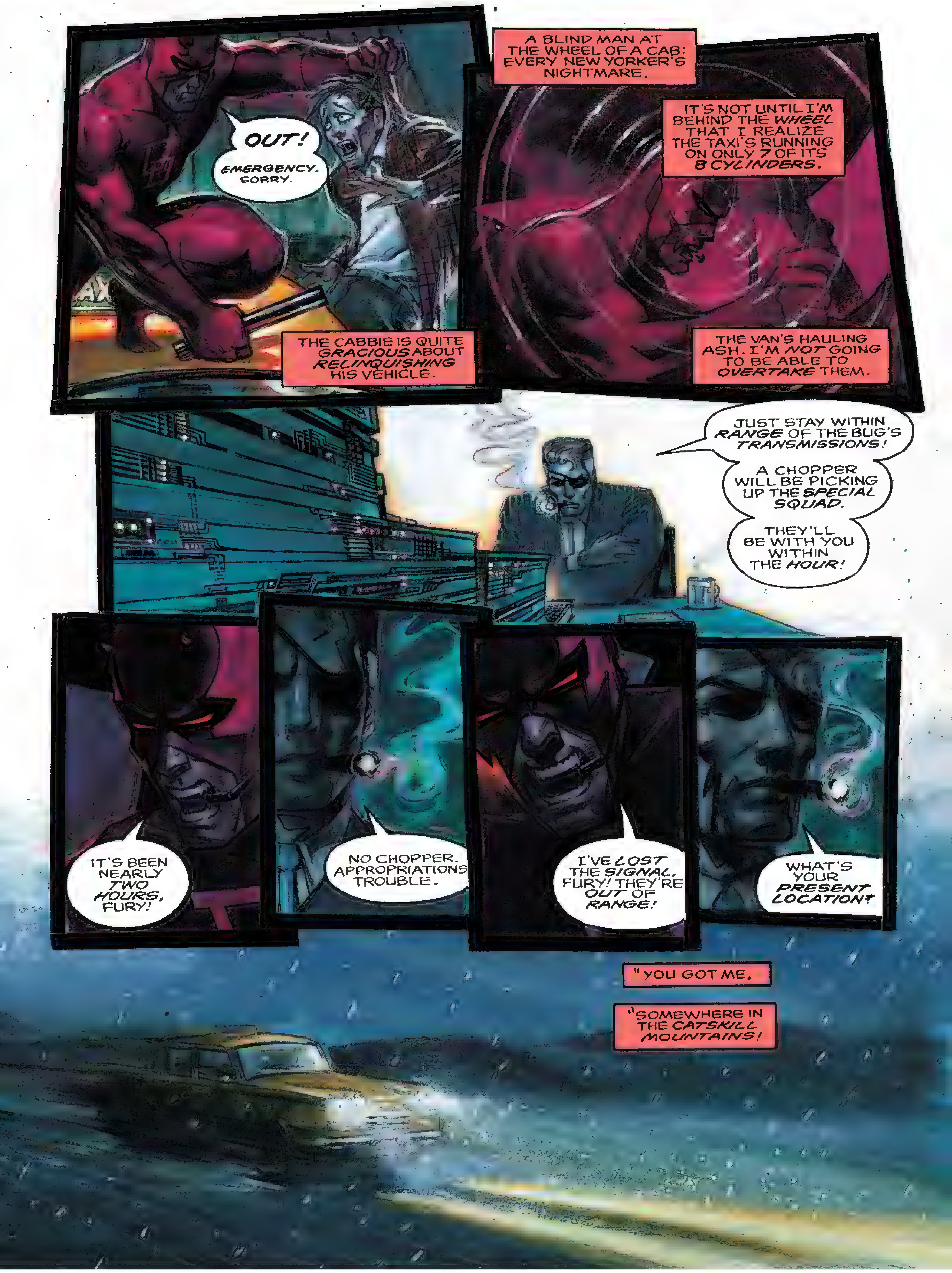

THE HEART WAS PUMPING PURE ADRENALINE.
I PRAYED THIS WASN'T JUST SOME RANDOM NEW YORK MUGGING.
THE DOUBT DIDN'T HOLD ME BACK ANY.
MY 125 POUNDS CRASHED DOWN ON HIM LIKE A TON OF BRICKS.
SO YOU CAN IMAGINE MY SHOCK WHEN HE DIDN'T STAY DOWN.
READIED MYSELF TO RIP INTO HIM WITH EVERYTHING I HAD.
WHICH IS WHY THE VAN DOOR CAUGHT ME BY SURPRISE.

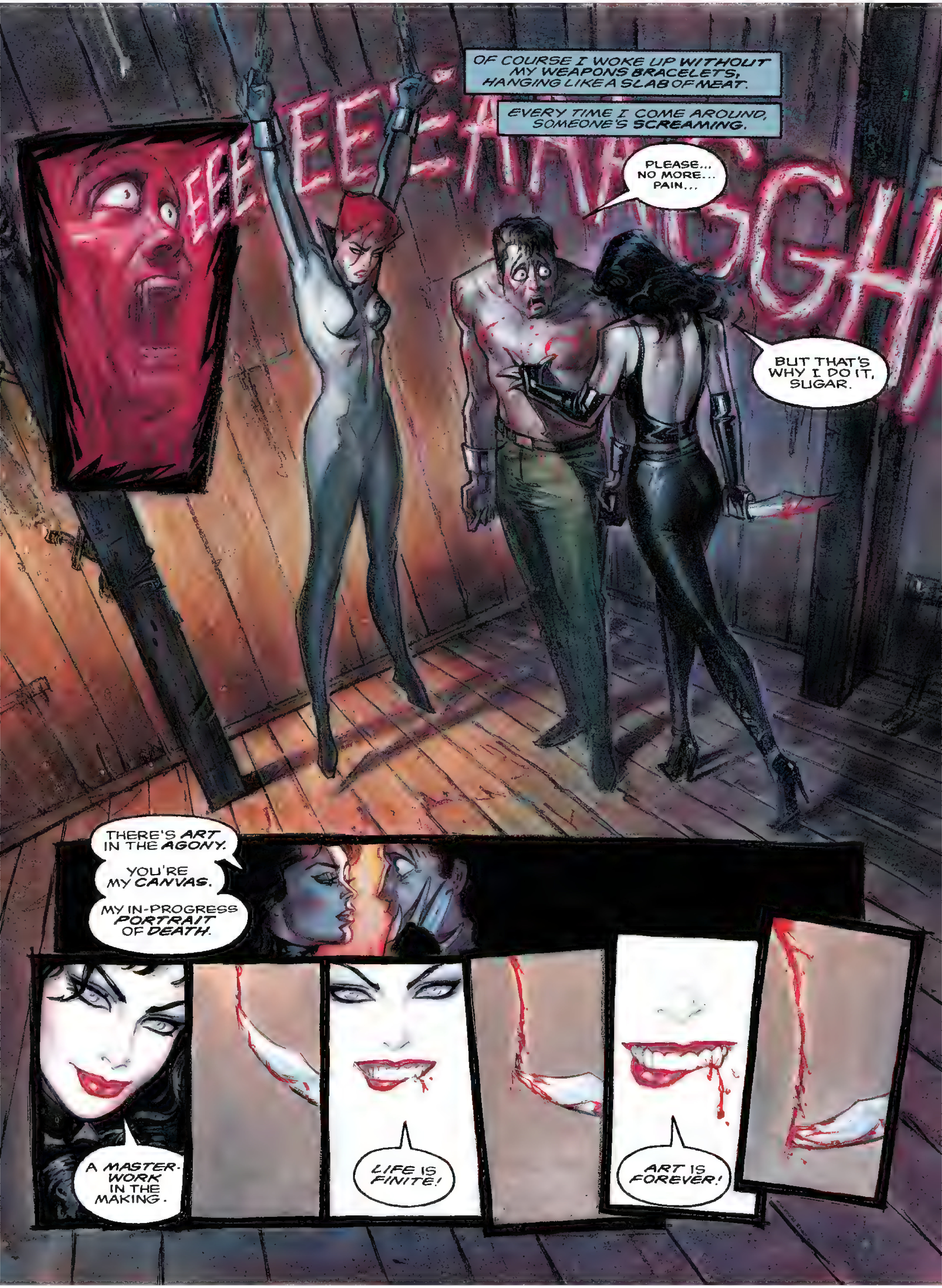

CAUGHT FLAT-FOOTED LIKE SOME RANK AMATEUR.
SHOULD HAVE USED MY WIDOW'S BITE RIGHT OFF.
A LIFE FULL OF SHOULD OFS.
A DEADLY MISTAKE.
ONE NOT ONLY I WOULD HAVE TO PAY FOR.
BANCROFT.
WILSON.
"THEY'VE LOADED ALL THREE INTO THE VAN AND ARE HEADING UPTOWN."
"I REPEAT: TAKE NO ACTION, DAREDEVIL."
BUS

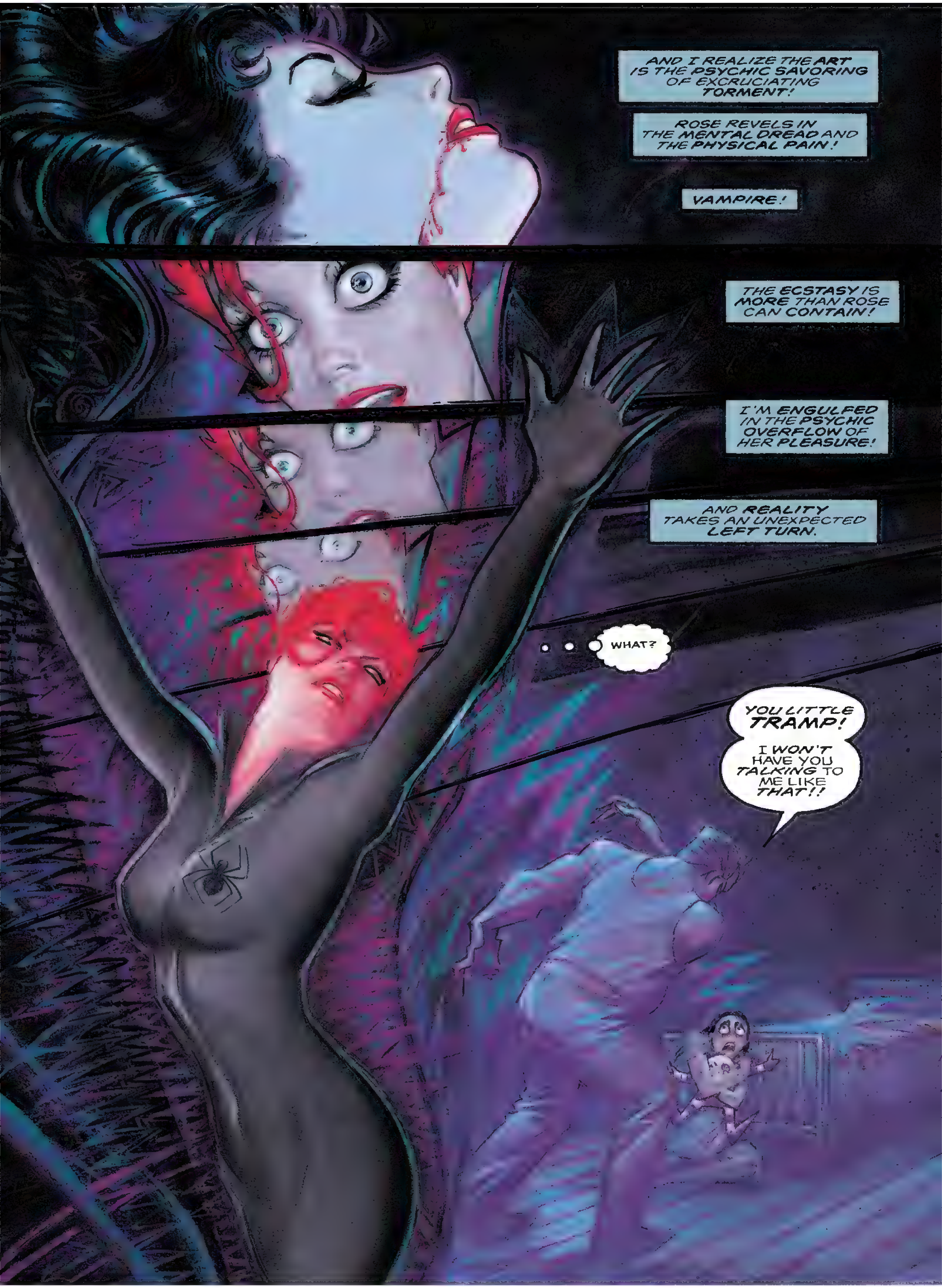

JUST USE THAT **TRACKING DEVICE** TO FOLLOW THE SIGNAL FROM THE **BUG** WE PLANTED IN THE **WIDOW'S BRACELET**.
I'VE GOT A **SPECIALLY EQUIPPED SQUAD** ON THE WAY.
LET **THEM** PLAY **HERO** THIS TIME.
WHY SHOULD I?
BECAUSE THAT PAIR ALREADY ***TOOK OUT*** ONE OF YOU ***SUPER HERO HOTSHOTS***.
ISN'T ***THAT*** ENOUGH REASON?
LET THE ***PROS*** HANDLE IT.
ONLY IF THE ***PROS*** SHOW UP IN TIME.

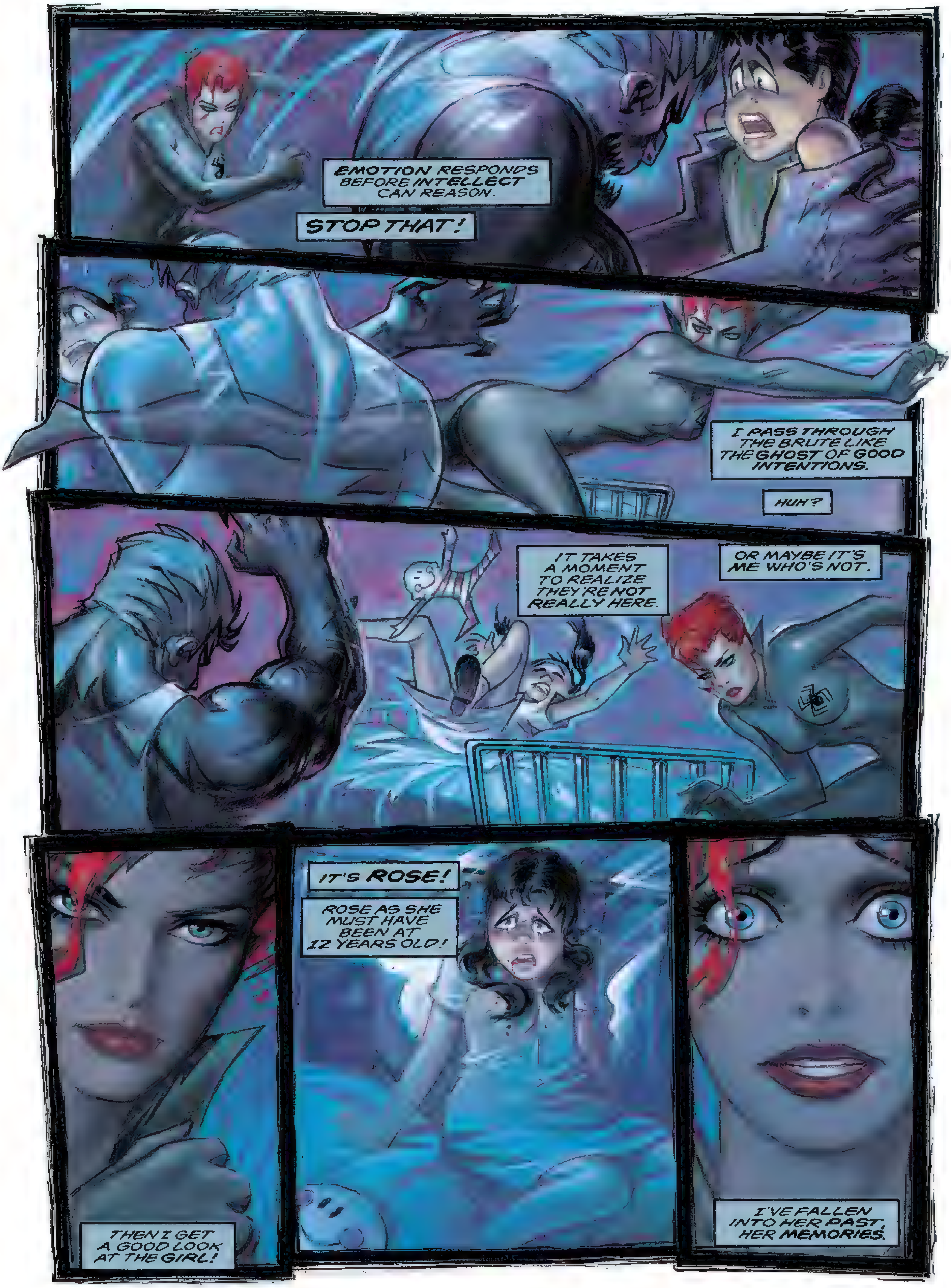

"THEY'RE HEADING UP PARK AVENUE, AROUND 75TH STREET.
"I DON'T LIKE THIS, FURY."
WHERE'S THE CAVALRY?
STUCK IN TRAFFIC AROUND 57TH STREET.
I'M GOING IN.
DON'T!
WE LOSE YOU WE LOSE ANY CHANCE OF SAVING THEM!
THEN MOVE IT, FURY!
HURRY!
"FURY, THEY'RE PULLING ONTO THE GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE!
"WHERE ARE YOUR MEN?!"
THIS IS NOT WORKING OUT, HORNHEAD.
WHERE?!
AROUND 125TH STREET.
IT'S YOUR MOVE, DAREDEVIL.
I'M TAKING THEM OUT!

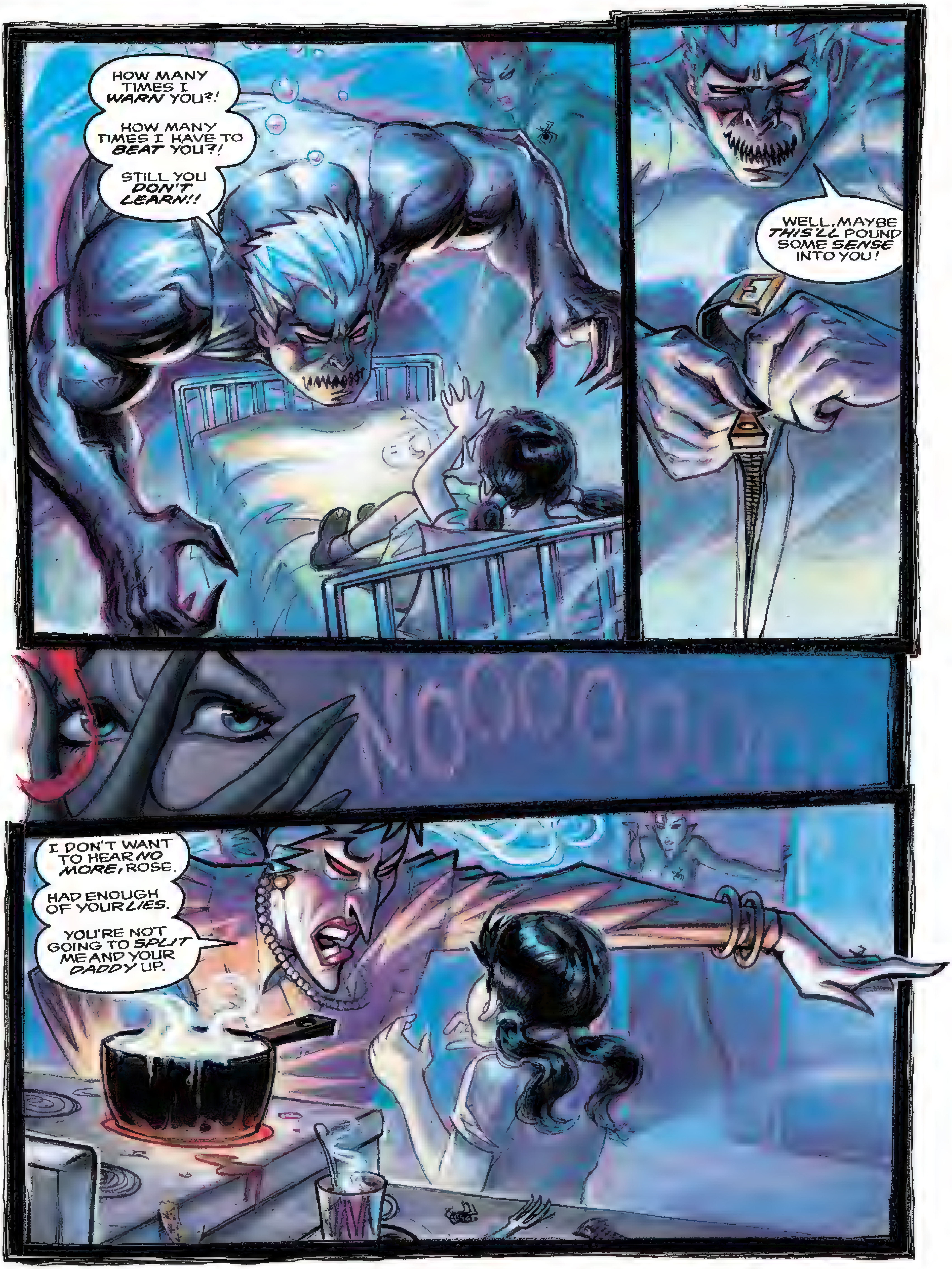

BUT SOMETIMES INTENTIONS ARE BEYOND REALIZATION, EVEN FOR US SUPER HERO HOTSHOTS.
UNUSUALLY LIGHT TRAFFIC AND THE VAN HITS THE FAST LANE.
I NEED WHEELS.
IN A MAD RUSH I PICK A TAXI JUST PULLING ONTO THE BRIDGE.
A BIG MISTAKE.

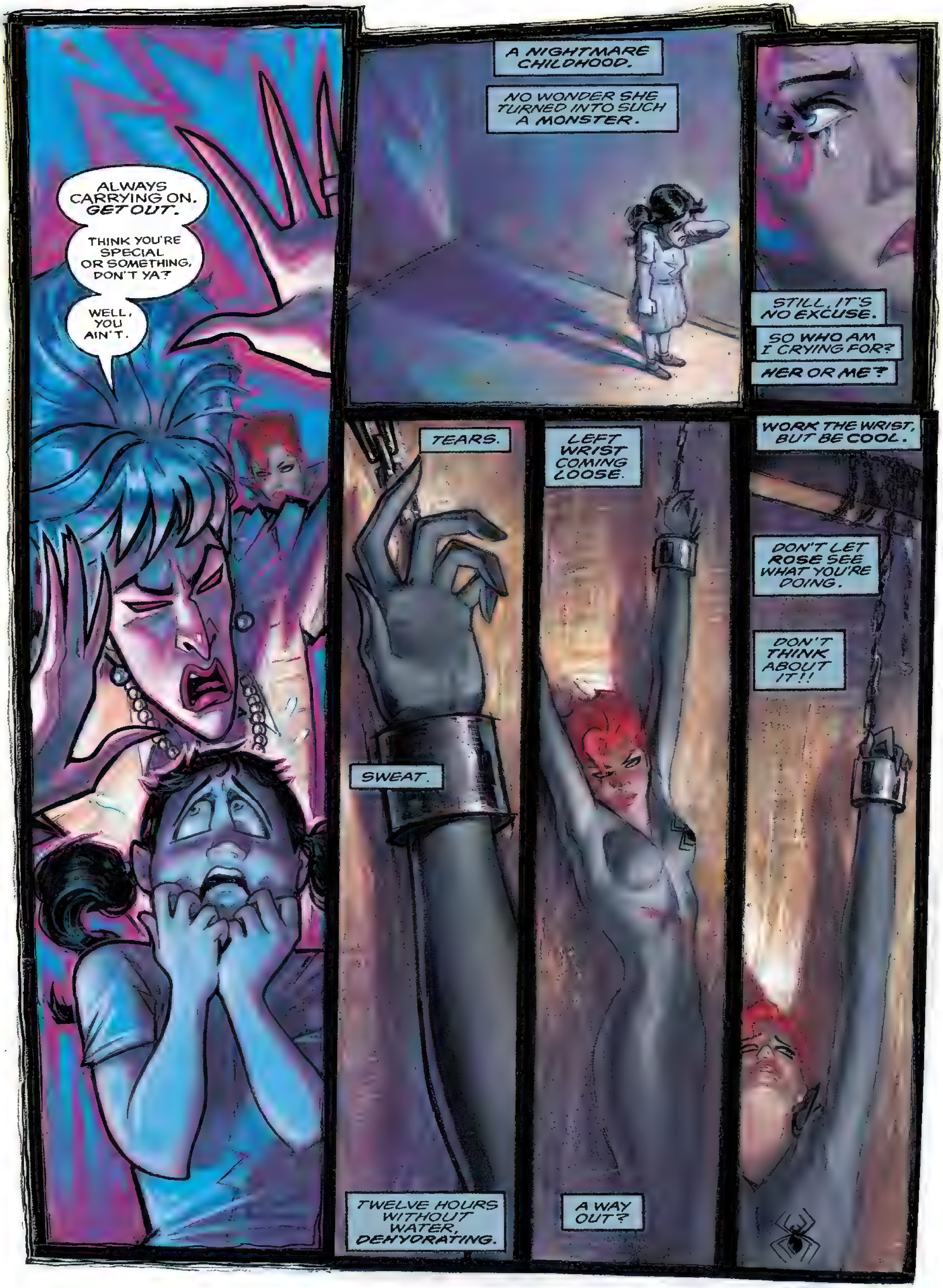

OUT!
EMERGENCY. SORRY.
THE CABBIE IS QUITE GRACIOUS ABOUT RELINQUISHING HIS VEHICLE.
A BLIND MAN AT THE WHEEL OF A CAB: EVERY NEW YORKER'S NIGHTMARE.
IT'S NOT UNTIL I'M BEHIND THE WHEEL THAT I REALIZE THE TAXI'S RUNNING ON ONLY 7 OF ITS 8 CYLINDERS.
THE VAN'S HAULING ASH. I'M NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO OVERTAKE THEM.
JUST STAY WITHIN RANGE OF THE BUG'S TRANSMISSIONS!
A CHOPPER WILL BE PICKING UP THE SPECIAL SQUAD.
THEY'LL BE WITH YOU WITHIN THE HOUR!
IT'S BEEN NEARLY TWO HOURS, FURY!
NO CHOPPER. APPROPRIATIONS TROUBLE.
I'VE LOST THE SIGNAL, FURY! THEY'RE OUT OF RANGE!
WHAT'S YOUR PRESENT LOCATION?
"YOU GOT ME,
"SOMEWHERE IN THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS!

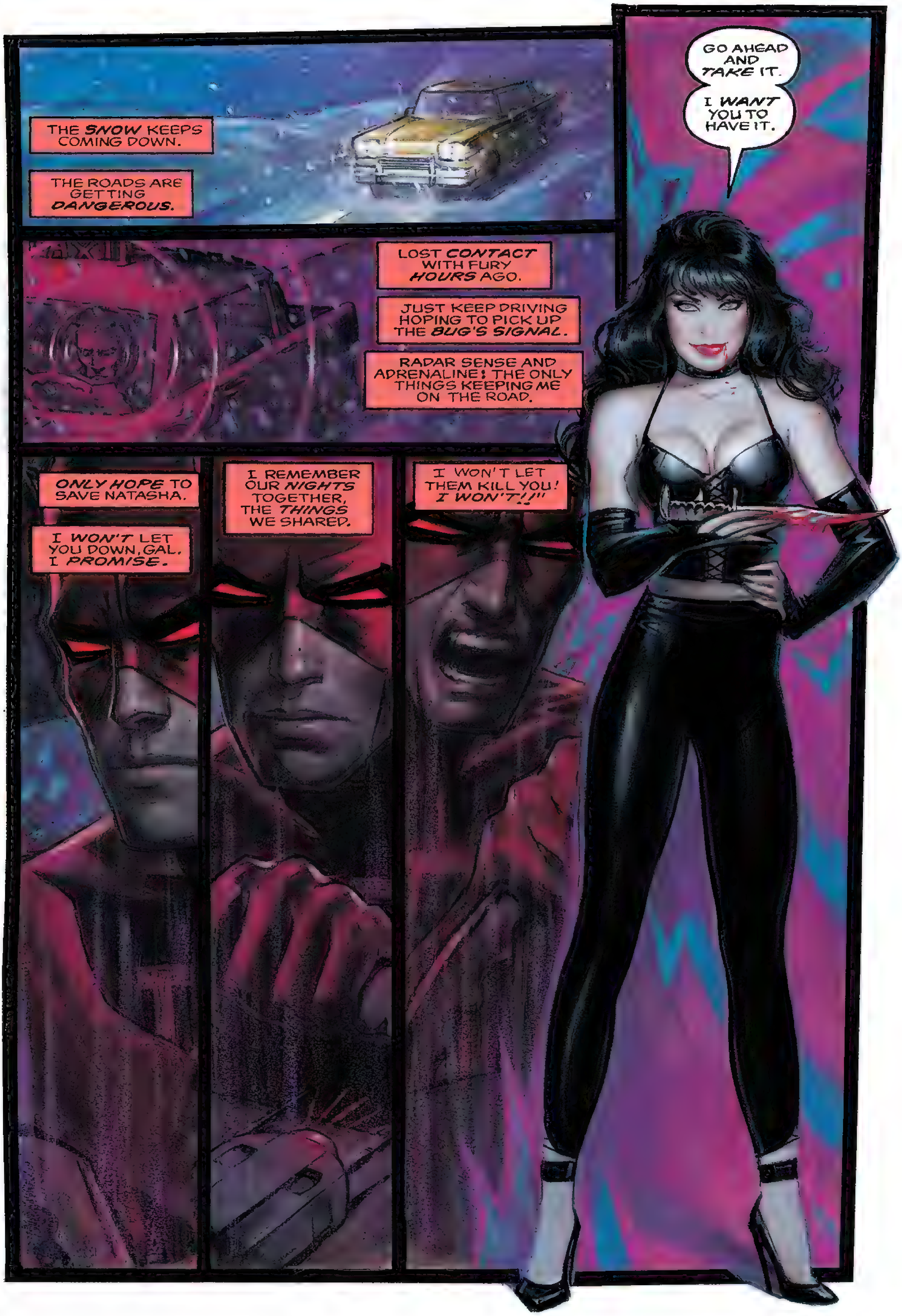

OF COURSE I WOKE UP WITHOUT MY WEAPONS BRACELETS, HANGING LIKE A SLAB OF MEAT.
EVERY TIME I COME AROUND, SOMEONE'S SCREAMING.
EEEEEEEEEAAAGGH
PLEASE... NO MORE... PAIN...
BUT THAT'S WHY I DO IT, SUGAR.
THERE'S ART IN THE AGONY.
YOU'RE MY CANVAS.
MY IN-PROGRESS PORTRAIT OF DEATH.
A MASTER-WORK IN THE MAKING.
LIFE IS FINITE!
ART IS FOREVER!

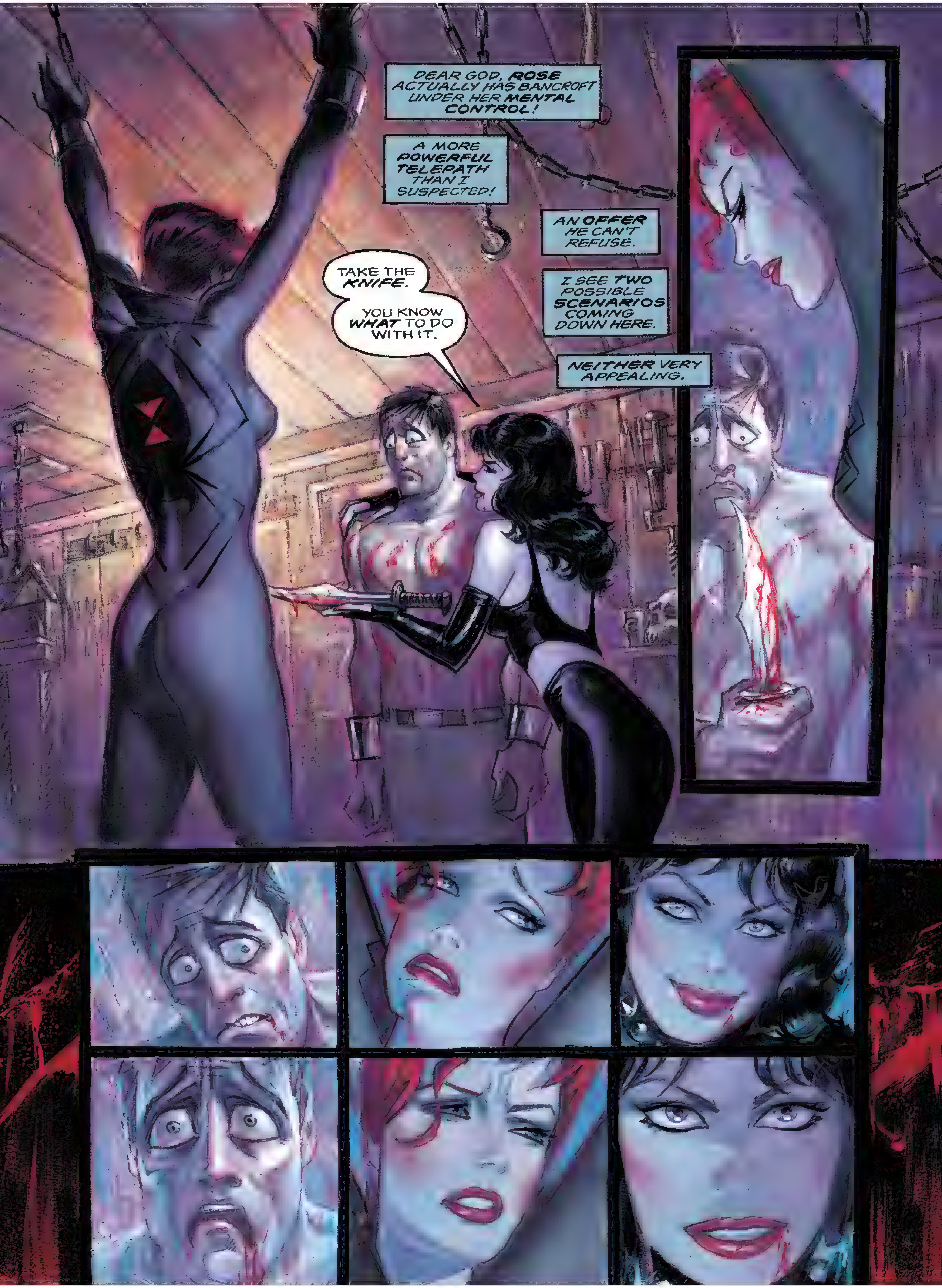

AND I REALIZE THE ART IS THE PSYCHIC SAVORING OF EXCRUCIATING TORMENT!
ROSE REVELS IN THE MENTAL DREAD AND THE PHYSICAL PAIN!
VAMPIRE!
THE ECSTASY IS MORE THAN ROSE CAN CONTAIN!
I'M ENGULFED IN THE PSYCHIC OVERFLOW OF HER PLEASURE!
AND REALITY TAKES AN UNEXPECTED LEFT TURN.
WHAT?
YOU LITTLE TRAMP!
I WON'T HAVE YOU TALKING TO ME LIKE THAT!!

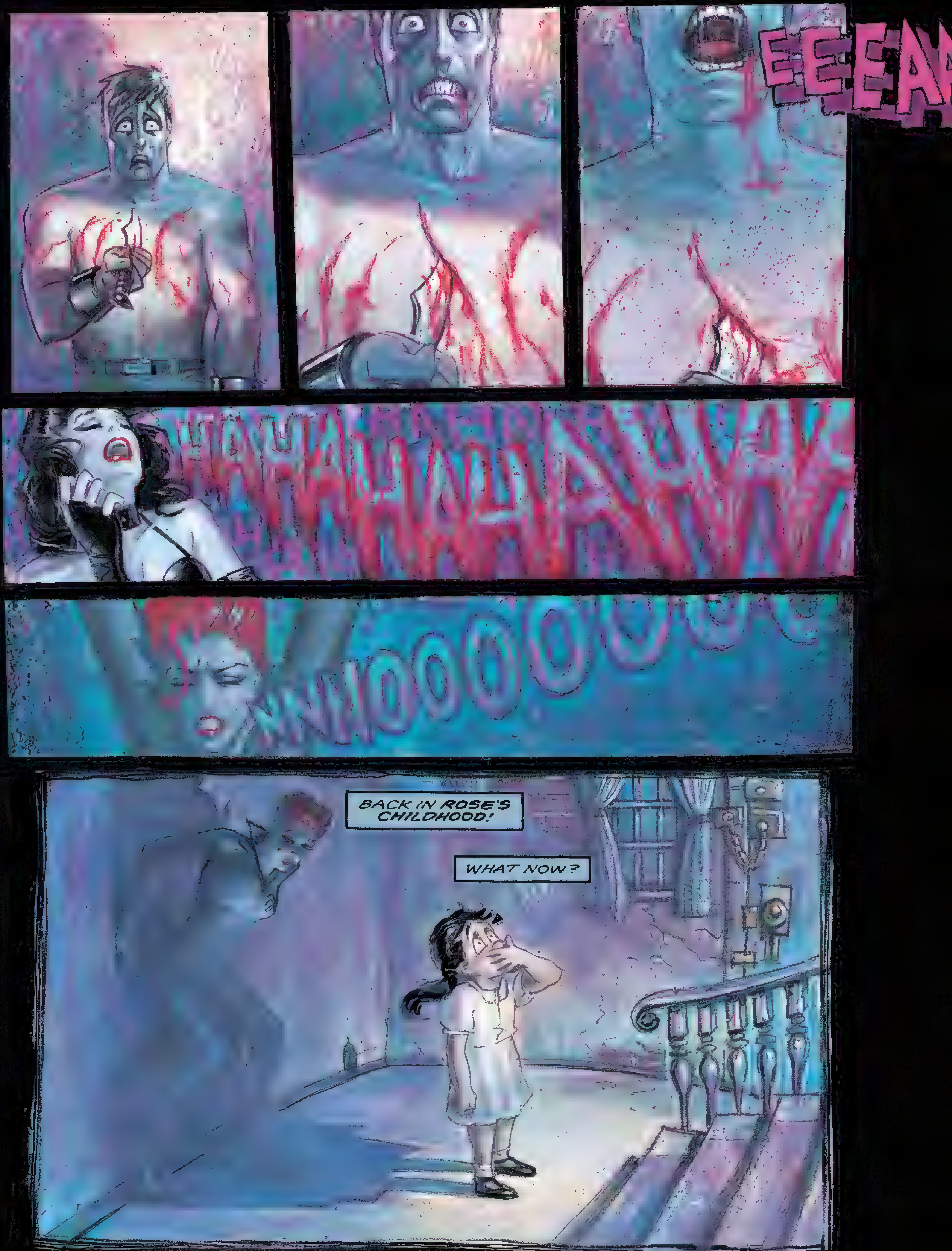

EMOTION RESPONDS BEFORE INTELLECT CAN REASON.
STOP THAT!
I PASS THROUGH THE BRUTE LIKE THE GHOST OF GOOD INTENTIONS.
HUH?
IT TAKES A MOMENT TO REALIZE THEY'RE NOT REALLY HERE.
OR MAYBE IT'S ME WHO'S NOT.
THEN I GET A GOOD LOOK AT THE GIRL!
IT'S ROSE!
ROSE AS SHE MUST HAVE BEEN AT 12 YEARS OLD!
I'VE FALLEN INTO HER PAST. HER MEMORIES.

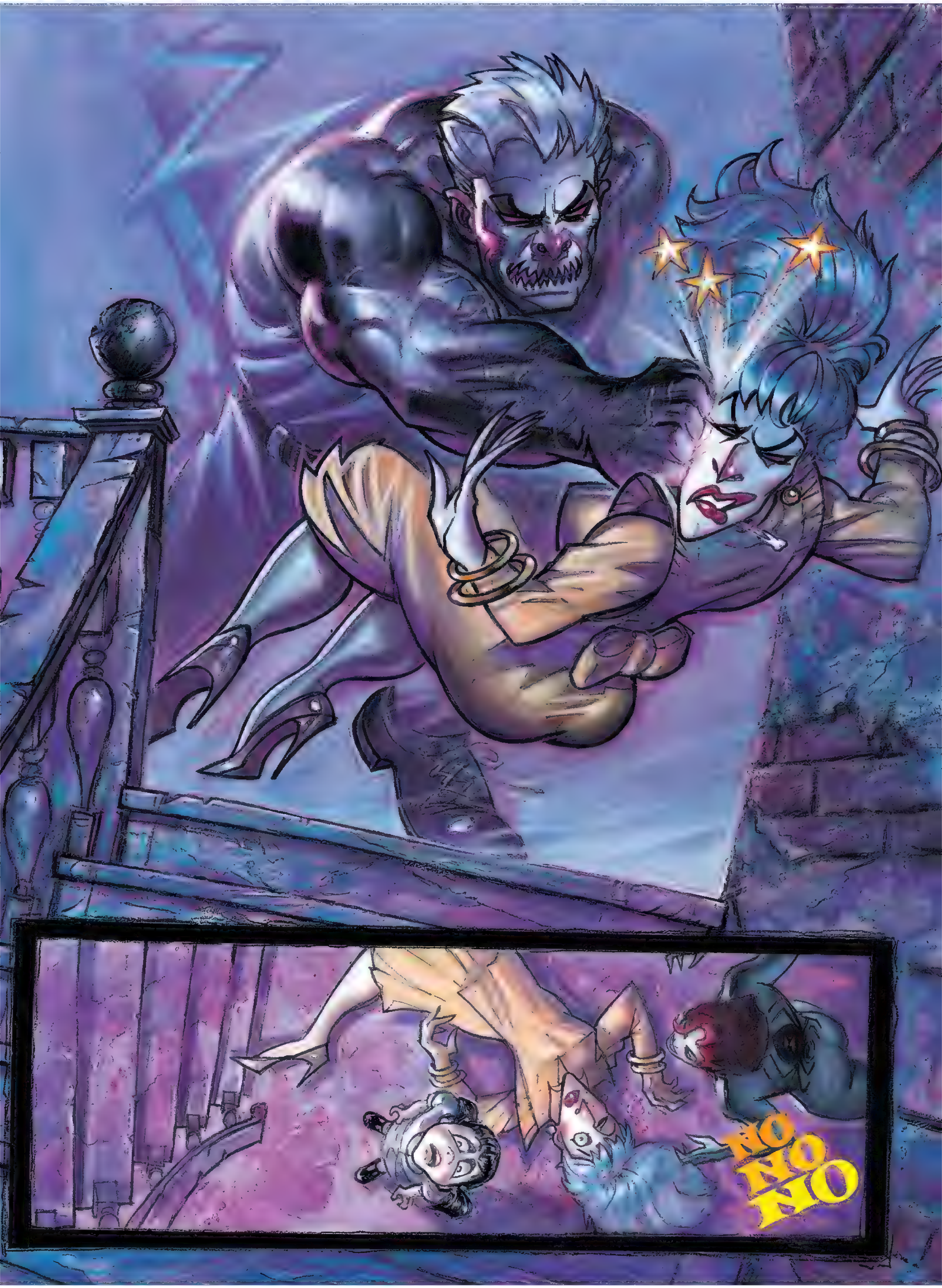

HOW MANY TIMES I *WARN* YOU?!
HOW MANY TIMES I HAVE TO *BEAT* YOU?!
STILL YOU *DON'T LEARN!!*
WELL, MAYBE *THIS'LL* POUND SOME *SENSE* INTO YOU!
NOOOOOO...
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR *NO MORE,* ROSE.
HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR *LIES.*
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO *SPLIT* ME AND YOUR *DADDY* UP.

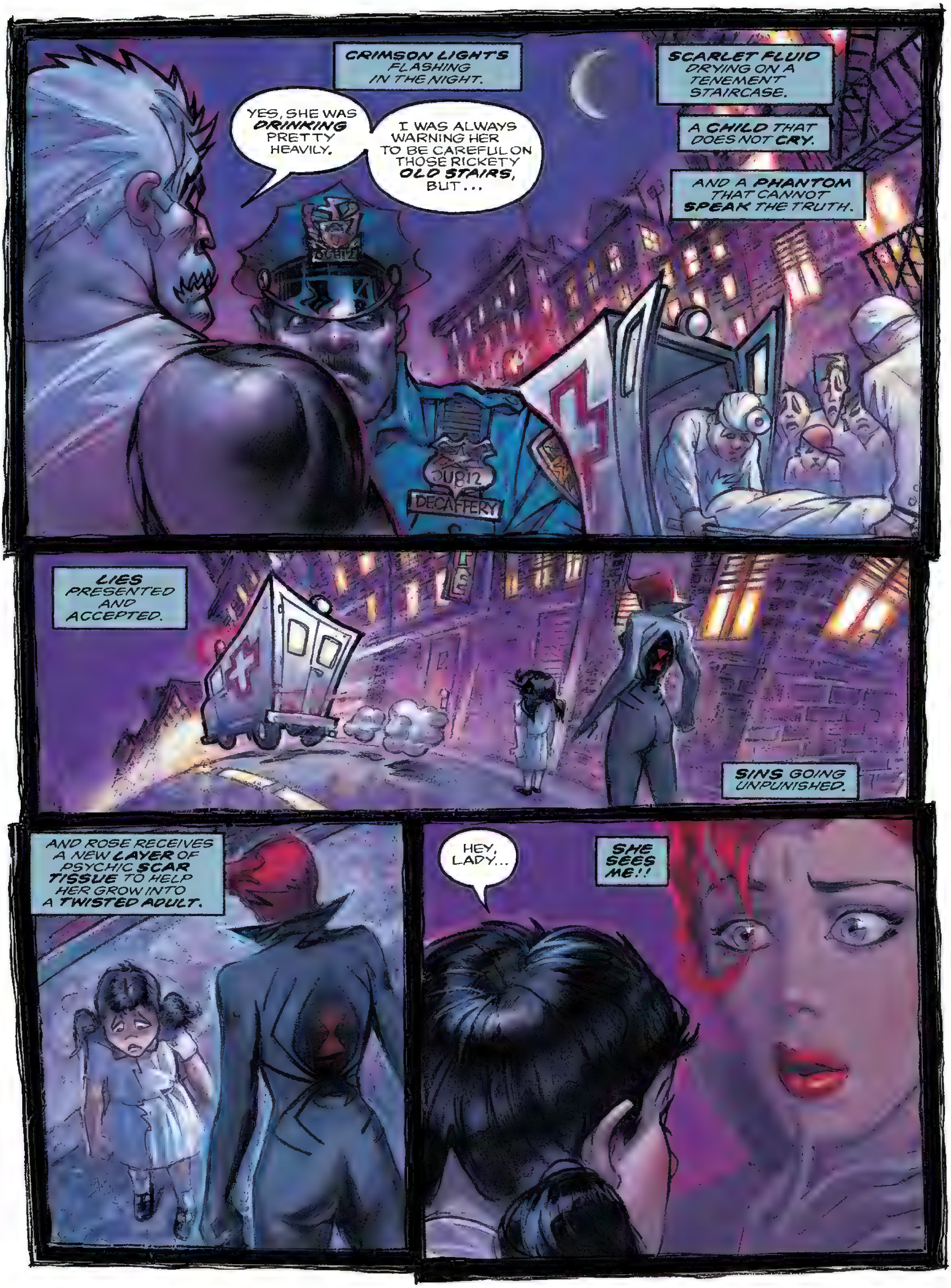

ALWAYS CARRYING ON. GET OUT.
THINK YOU'RE SPECIAL OR SOMETHING, DON'T YA?
WELL, YOU AIN'T.
A NIGHTMARE CHILDHOOD.
NO WONDER SHE TURNED INTO SUCH A MONSTER.
STILL, IT'S NO EXCUSE.
SO WHO AM I CRYING FOR?
HER OR ME?
TEARS.
SWEAT.
TWELVE HOURS WITHOUT WATER. DEHYDRATING.
LEFT WRIST COMING LOOSE.
A WAY OUT?
WORK THE WRIST, BUT BE COOL.
DON'T LET ROSE SEE WHAT YOU'RE DOING.
DON'T THINK ABOUT IT!!

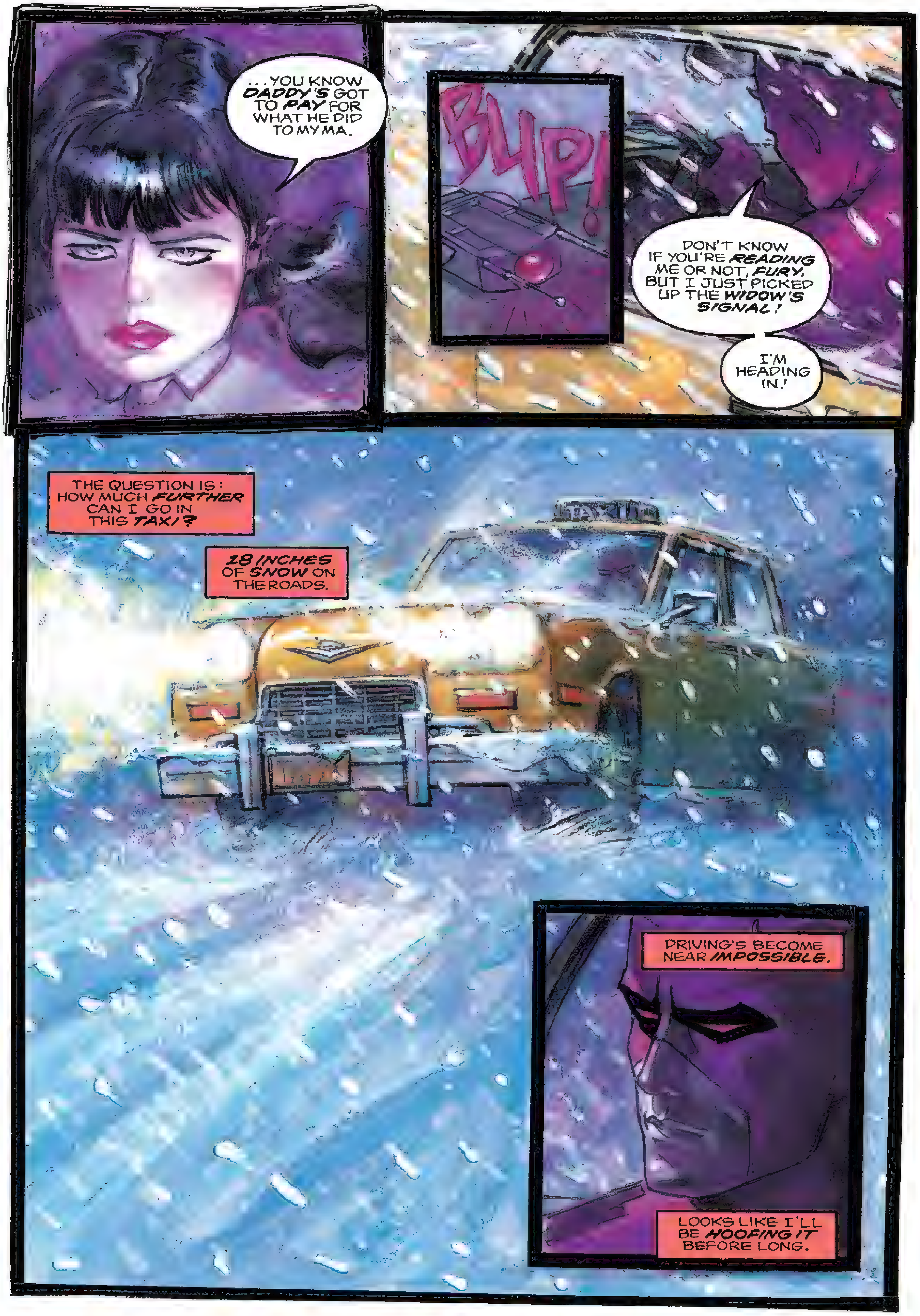

THE SNOW KEEPS COMING DOWN.
THE ROADS ARE GETTING DANGEROUS.
LOST CONTACT WITH FURY HOURS AGO.
JUST KEEP DRIVING HOPING TO PICK UP THE BUG'S SIGNAL.
RADAR SENSE AND ADRENALINE: THE ONLY THINGS KEEPING ME ON THE ROAD.
ONLY HOPE TO SAVE NATASHA.
I WON'T LET YOU DOWN, GAL. I PROMISE.
I REMEMBER OUR NIGHTS TOGETHER, THE THINGS WE SHARED.
I WON'T LET THEM KILL YOU! I WON'T!!"
GO AHEAD AND TAKE IT.
I WANT YOU TO HAVE IT.

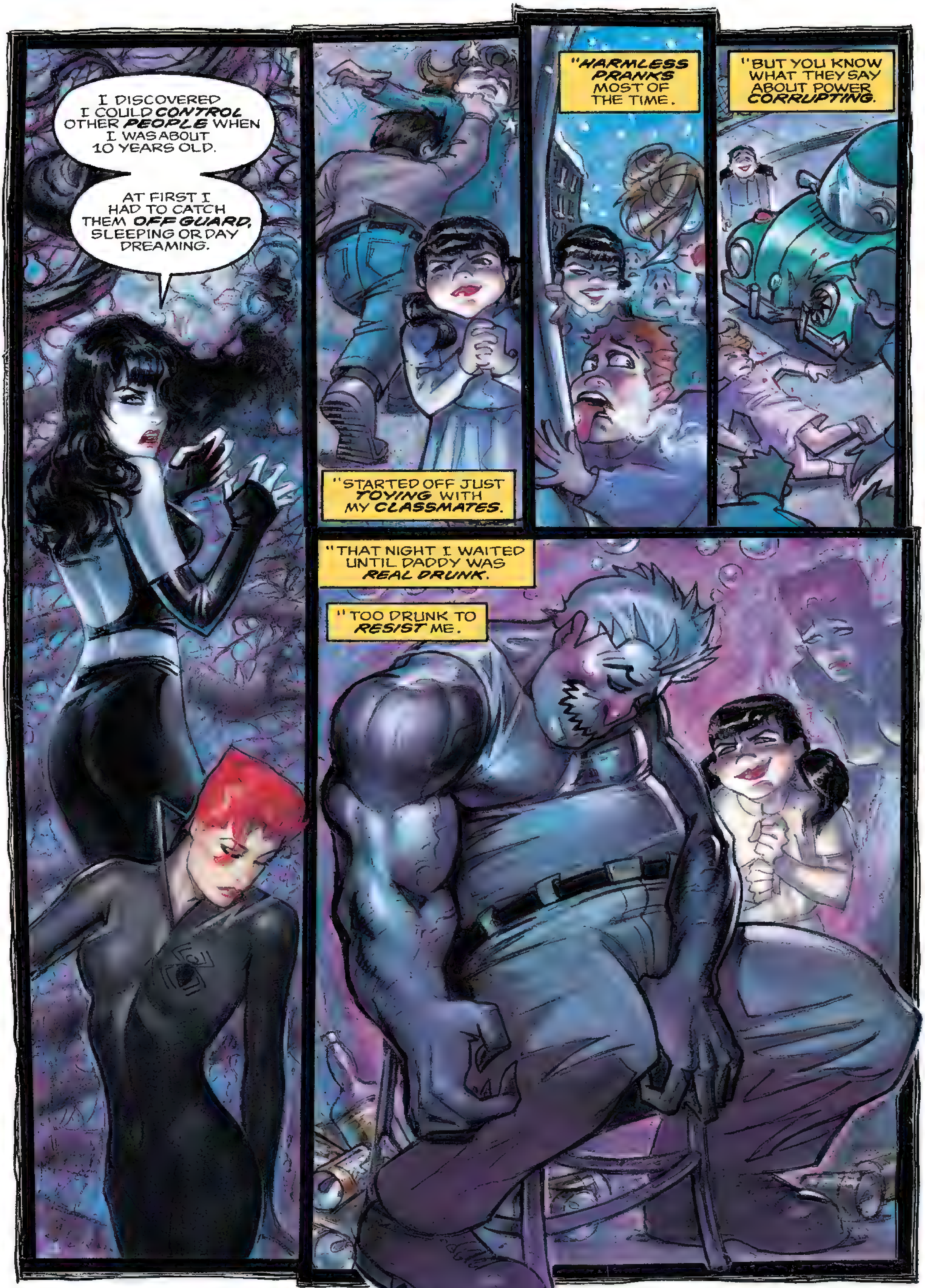

DEAR GOD, **ROSE** ACTUALLY HAS BANCROFT UNDER HER **MENTAL CONTROL**!
A MORE **POWERFUL TELEPATH** THAN I SUSPECTED!
TAKE THE ***KNIFE***.
YOU KNOW ***WHAT*** TO DO WITH IT.
AN **OFFER** HE CAN'T REFUSE.
I SEE **TWO** POSSIBLE **SCENARIOS** COMING DOWN HERE.
NEITHER VERY APPEALING.

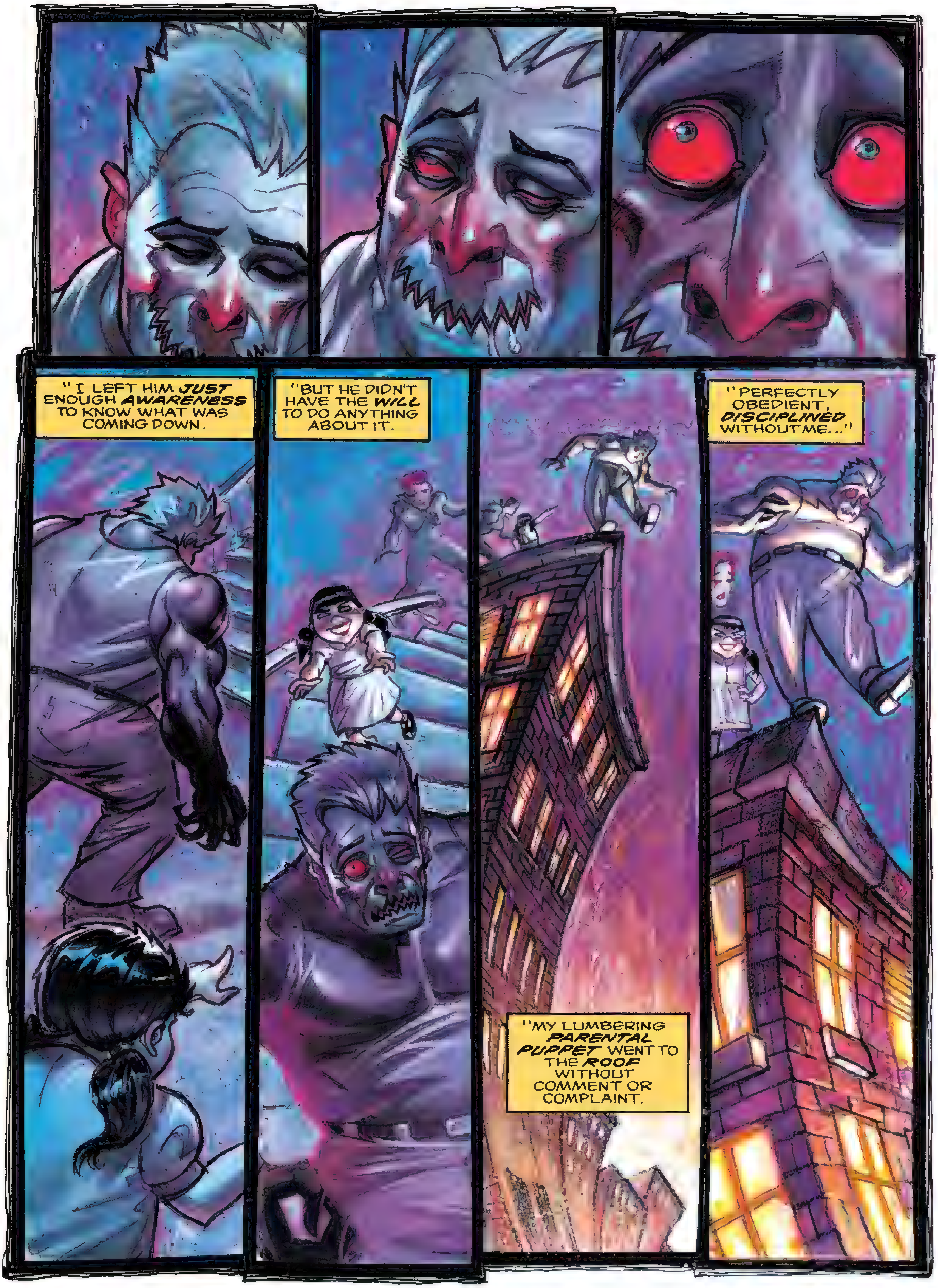

EEEAA
HAHAHAHAHAHAHA
WHOOOOOOOO
BACK IN ROSE'S CHILDHOOD!
WHAT NOW?

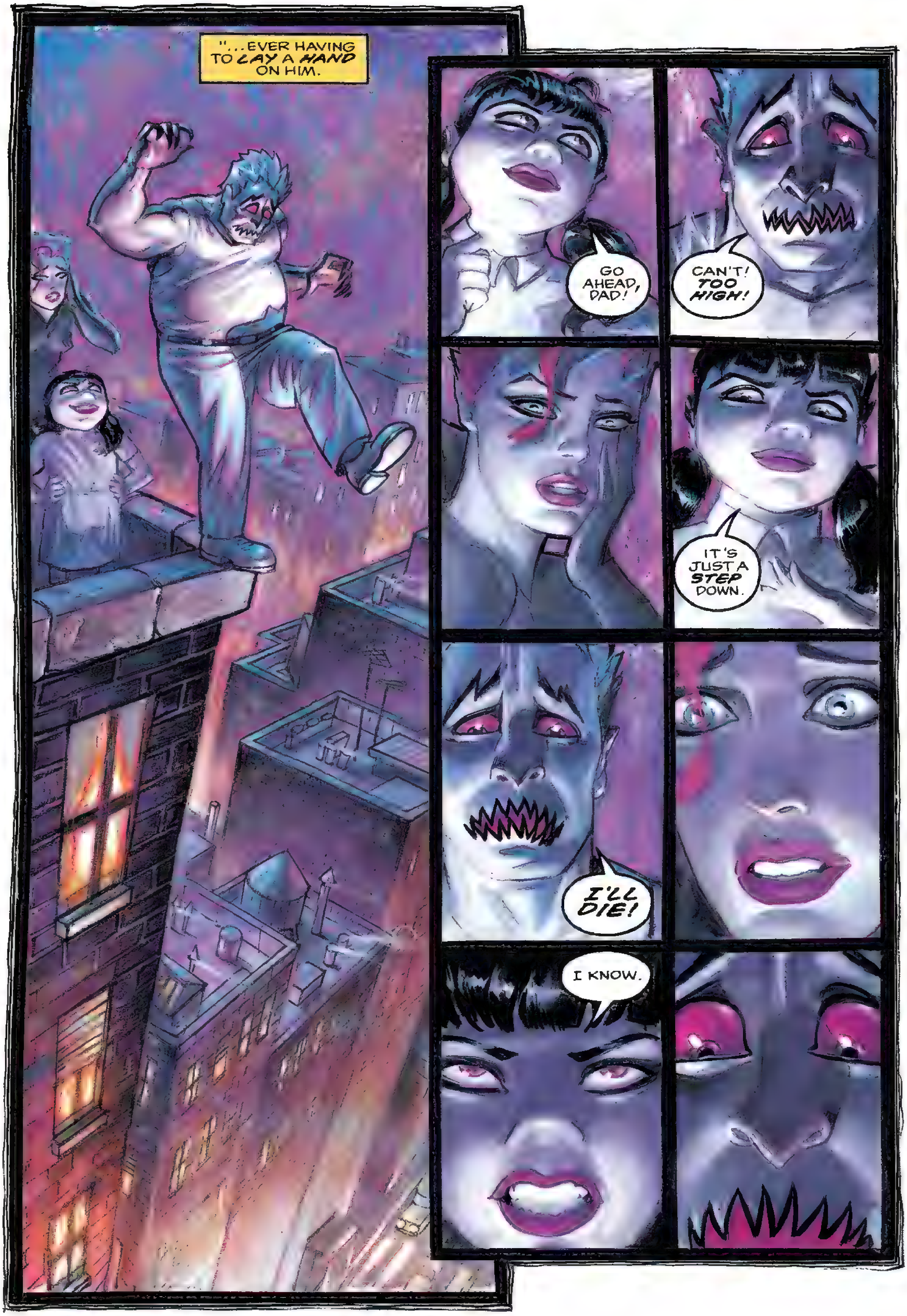

NO NO NO


CRIMSON LIGHTS FLASHING IN THE NIGHT.
SCARLET FLUID DRYING ON A TENEMENT STAIRCASE.
YES, SHE WAS DRINKING PRETTY HEAVILY.
I WAS ALWAYS WARNING HER TO BE CAREFUL ON THOSE RICKETY OLD STAIRS, BUT...
A CHILD THAT DOES NOT CRY.
AND A PHANTOM THAT CANNOT SPEAK THE TRUTH.
DUB12
DECAFFERY
LIES PRESENTED AND ACCEPTED.
SINS GOING UNPUNISHED.
AND ROSE RECEIVES A NEW LAYER OF PSYCHIC SCAR TISSUE TO HELP HER GROW INTO A TWISTED ADULT.
HEY, LADY...
SHE SEES ME!!

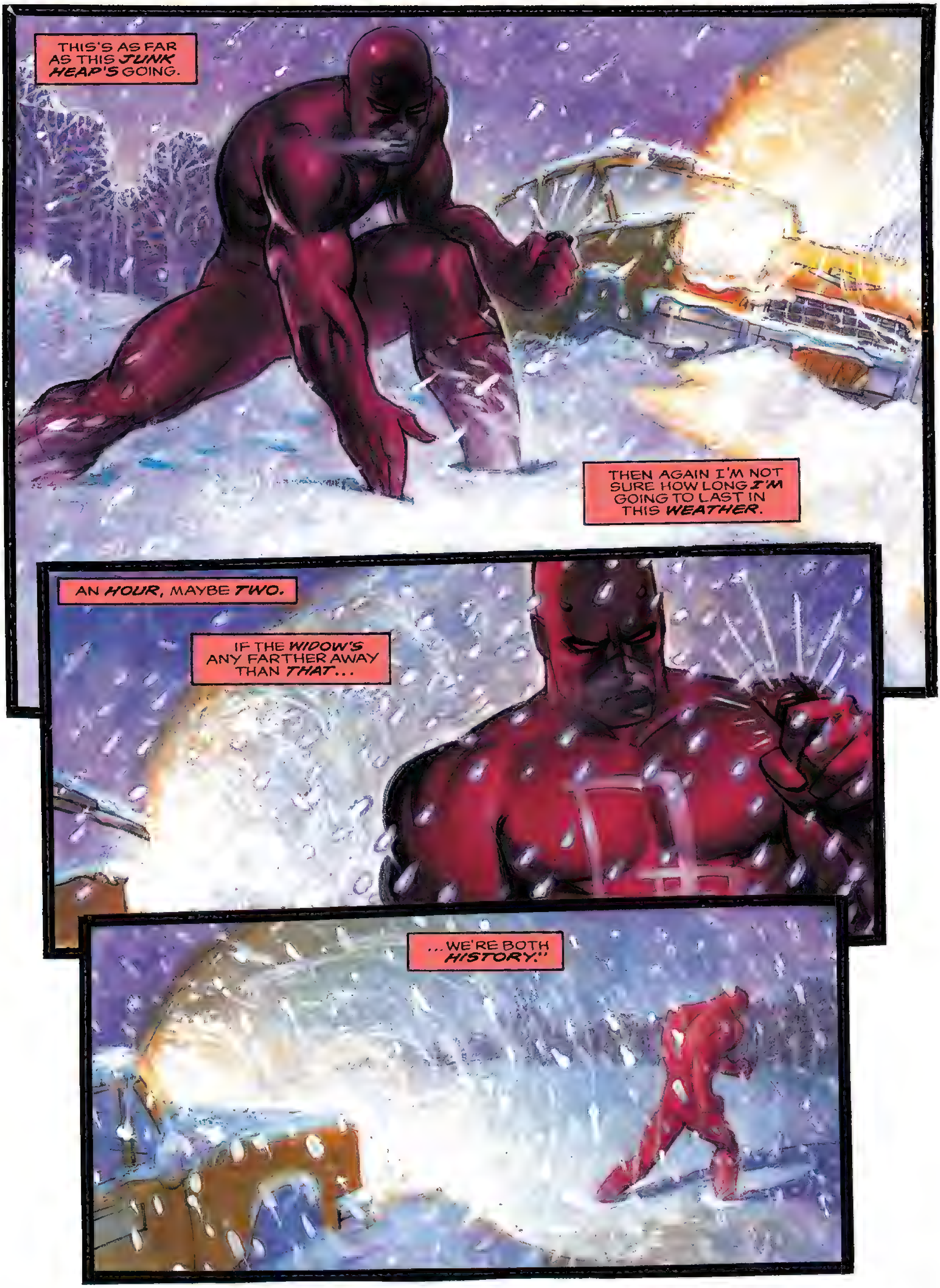

...YOU KNOW *DADDY'S* GOT TO *PAY* FOR WHAT HE DID TO MY MA.
BLIP!
DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE *READING* ME OR NOT, *FURY,* BUT I JUST PICKED UP THE *WIDOW'S SIGNAL!*
I'M HEADING IN!
THE QUESTION IS: HOW MUCH *FURTHER* CAN I GO IN THIS *TAXI?*
28 INCHES OF *SNOW* ON THE ROADS.
TAXI
DRIVING'S BECOME NEAR *IMPOSSIBLE.*
LOOKS LIKE I'LL BE *HOOFING IT* BEFORE LONG.

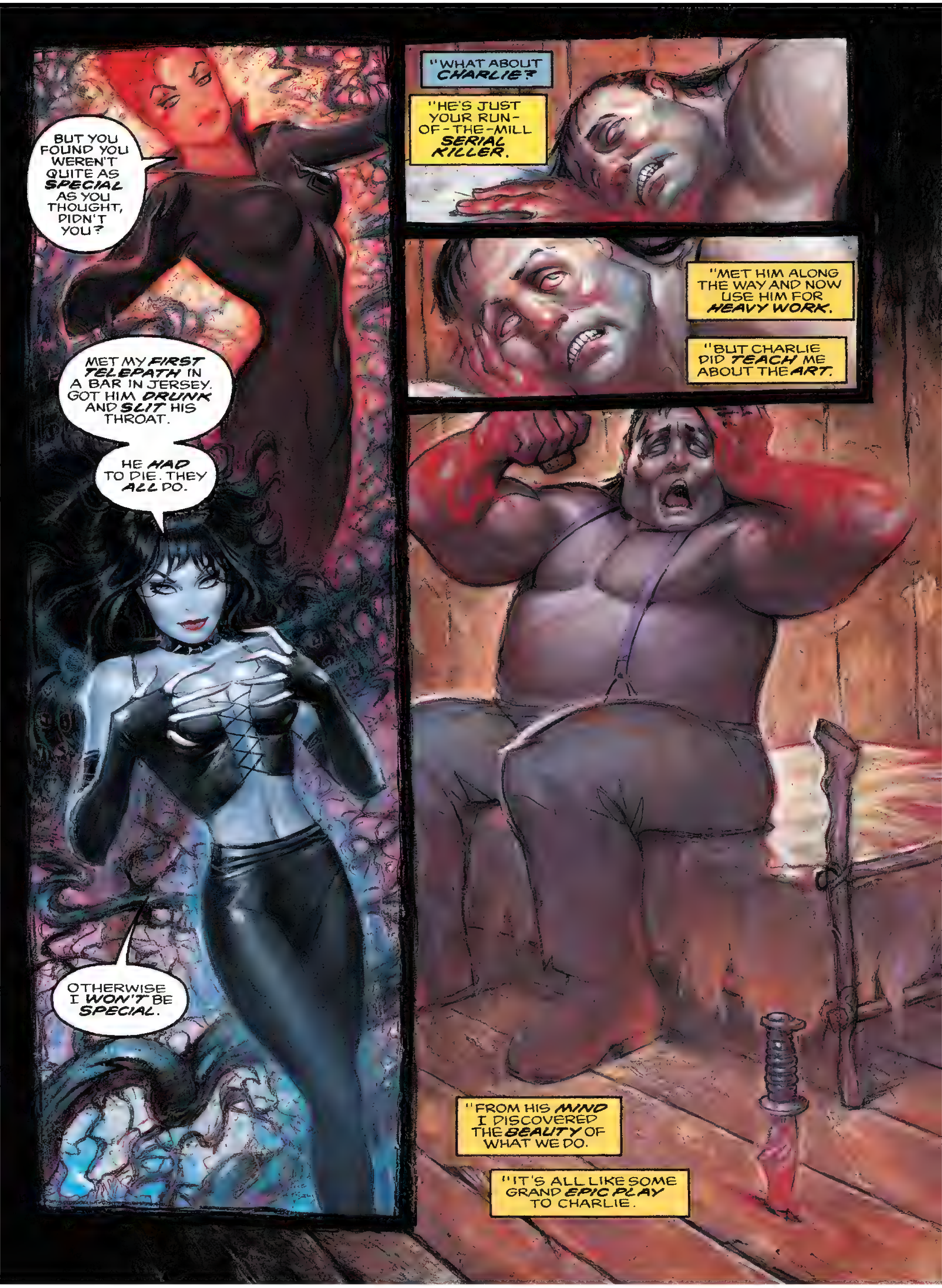

I DISCOVERED I COULD **CONTROL** OTHER **PEOPLE** WHEN I WAS ABOUT 10 YEARS OLD.
AT FIRST I HAD TO CATCH THEM **OFF GUARD,** SLEEPING OR DAY DREAMING.
"STARTED OFF JUST **TOYING** WITH MY **CLASSMATES.**
"**HARMLESS PRANKS** MOST OF THE TIME.
"BUT YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT POWER **CORRUPTING.**
"THAT NIGHT I WAITED UNTIL DADDY WAS **REAL DRUNK.**
"TOO DRUNK TO **RESIST** ME.

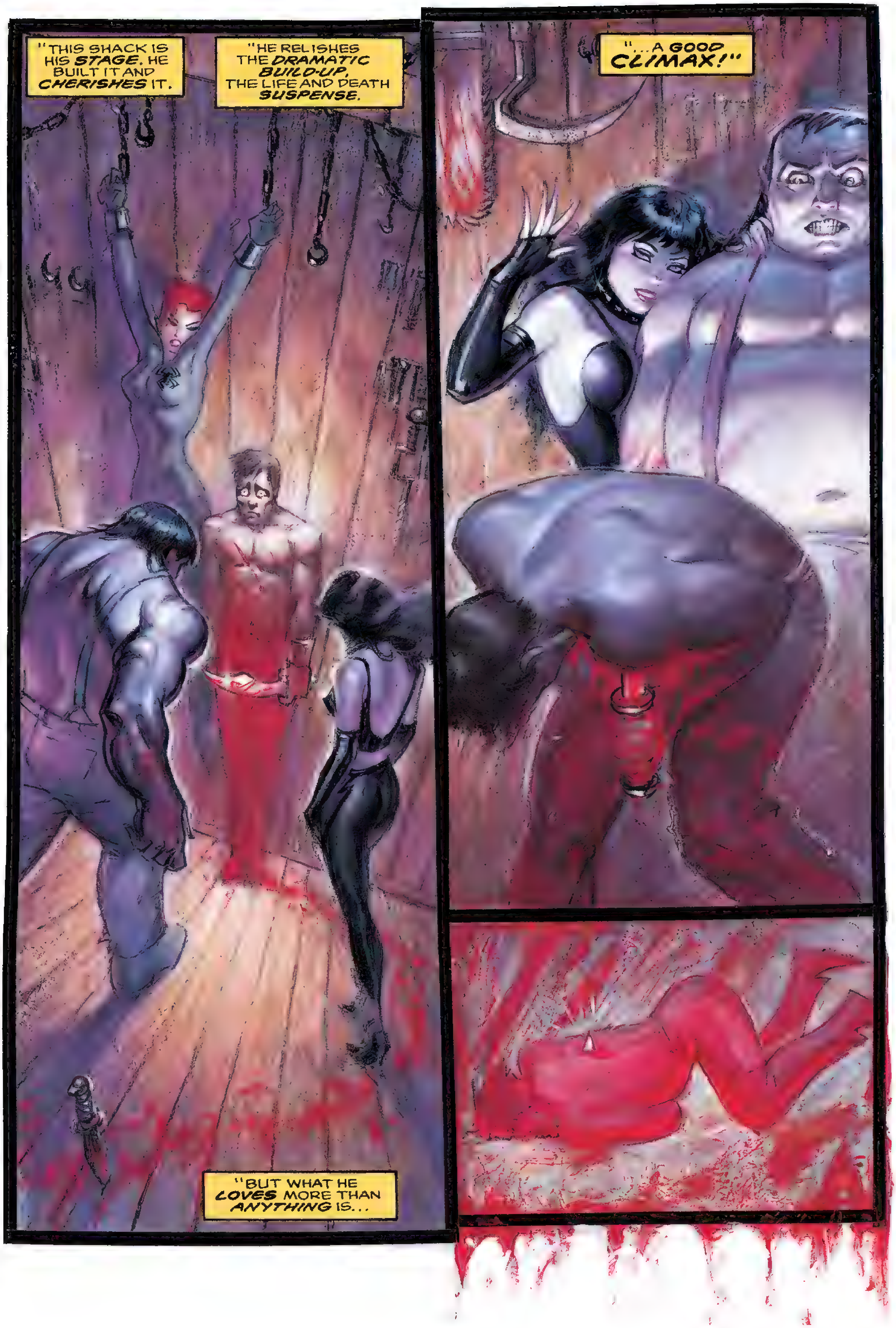

"I LEFT HIM *JUST* ENOUGH *AWARENESS* TO KNOW WHAT WAS COMING DOWN.
"BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE THE *WILL* TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.
"MY LUMBERING *PARENTAL PUPPET* WENT TO THE *ROOF* WITHOUT COMMENT OR COMPLAINT.
"PERFECTLY OBEDIENT, *DISCIPLINED* WITHOUT ME..."

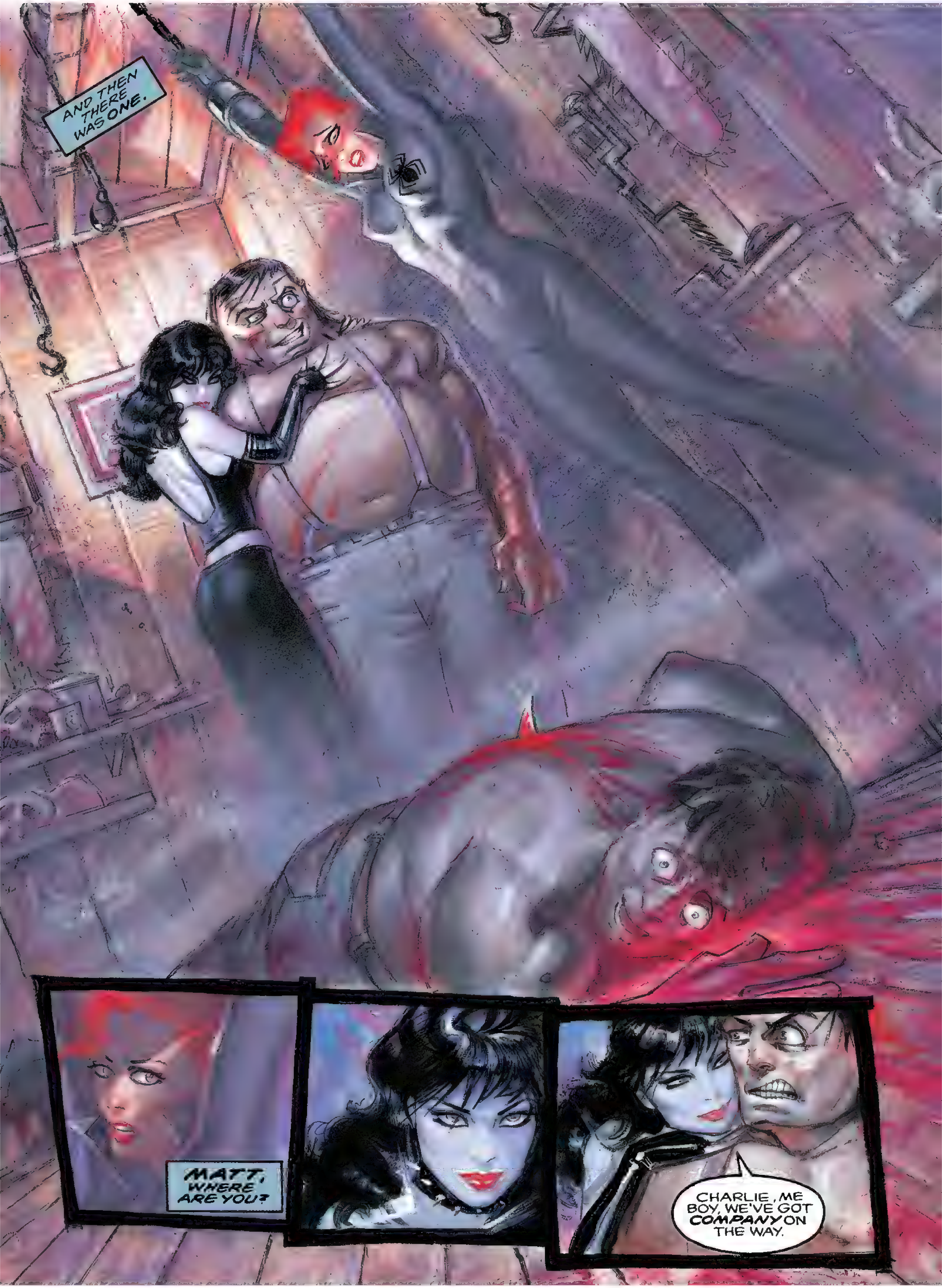

"...EVER HAVING TO *LAY* A *HAND* ON HIM.
GO AHEAD, DAD!
CAN'T! *TOO HIGH!*
IT'S JUST A *STEP* DOWN.
I'LL DIE!
I KNOW.

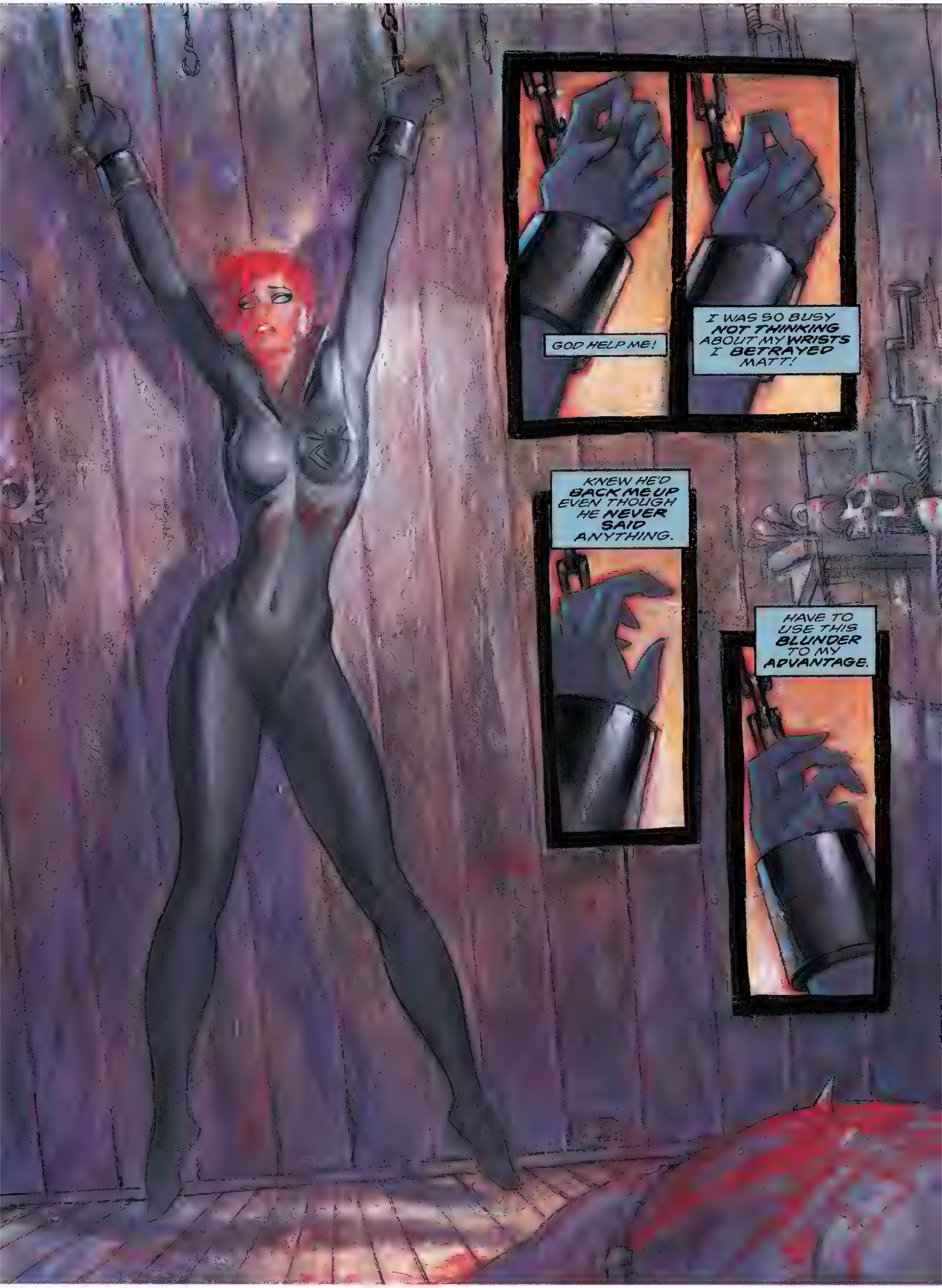
I GUESS THIS MAKES ME AN *ORPHAN*.
HOW SAD.
BUT YOU KNOW, MOMMA WAS *WRONG*.
DEAD WRONG.
IT TURNED OUT I WAS *VERY SPECIAL*.

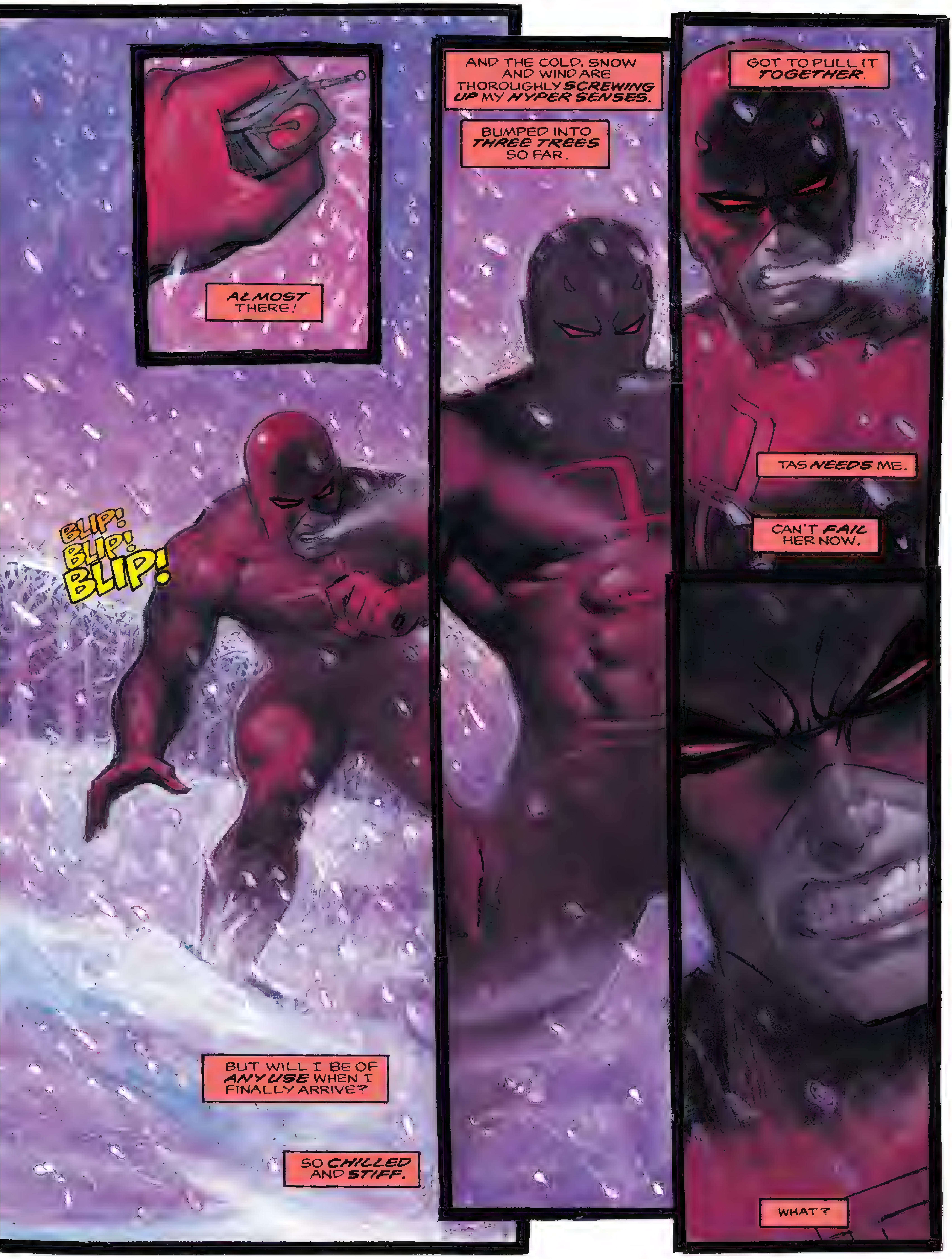

THIS'S AS FAR AS THIS *JUNK HEAP'S* GOING.
THEN AGAIN I'M NOT SURE HOW LONG *I'M* GOING TO LAST IN THIS *WEATHER*.
AN *HOUR*, MAYBE *TWO*.
IF THE *WIDOW'S* ANY FARTHER AWAY THAN *THAT*...
...WE'RE BOTH *HISTORY*."

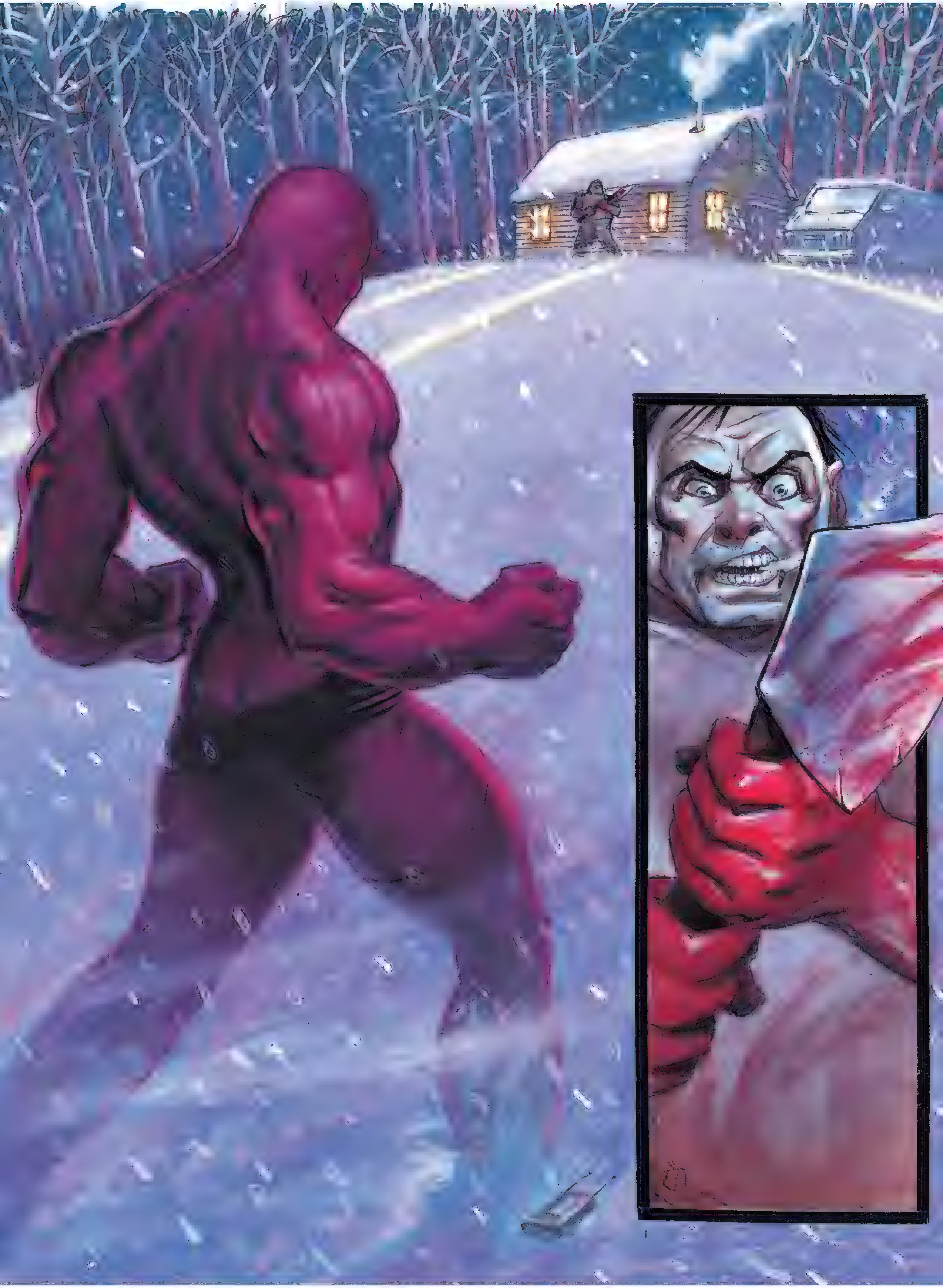

BUT YOU FOUND YOU WEREN'T QUITE AS **SPECIAL** AS YOU THOUGHT, DIDN'T YOU?
MET MY **FIRST TELEPATH** IN A BAR IN JERSEY. GOT HIM **DRUNK** AND **SLIT** HIS THROAT.
HE **HAD** TO DIE. THEY **ALL** DO.
OTHERWISE I **WON'T** BE **SPECIAL**.
"WHAT ABOUT **CHARLIE?**
"HE'S JUST YOUR RUN-OF-THE-MILL **SERIAL KILLER**.
"MET HIM ALONG THE WAY AND NOW USE HIM FOR **HEAVY WORK**.
"BUT CHARLIE DID **TEACH** ME ABOUT THE **ART**.
"FROM HIS **MIND** I DISCOVERED THE **BEAUTY** OF WHAT WE DO.
"IT'S ALL LIKE SOME GRAND **EPIC PLAY** TO CHARLIE.

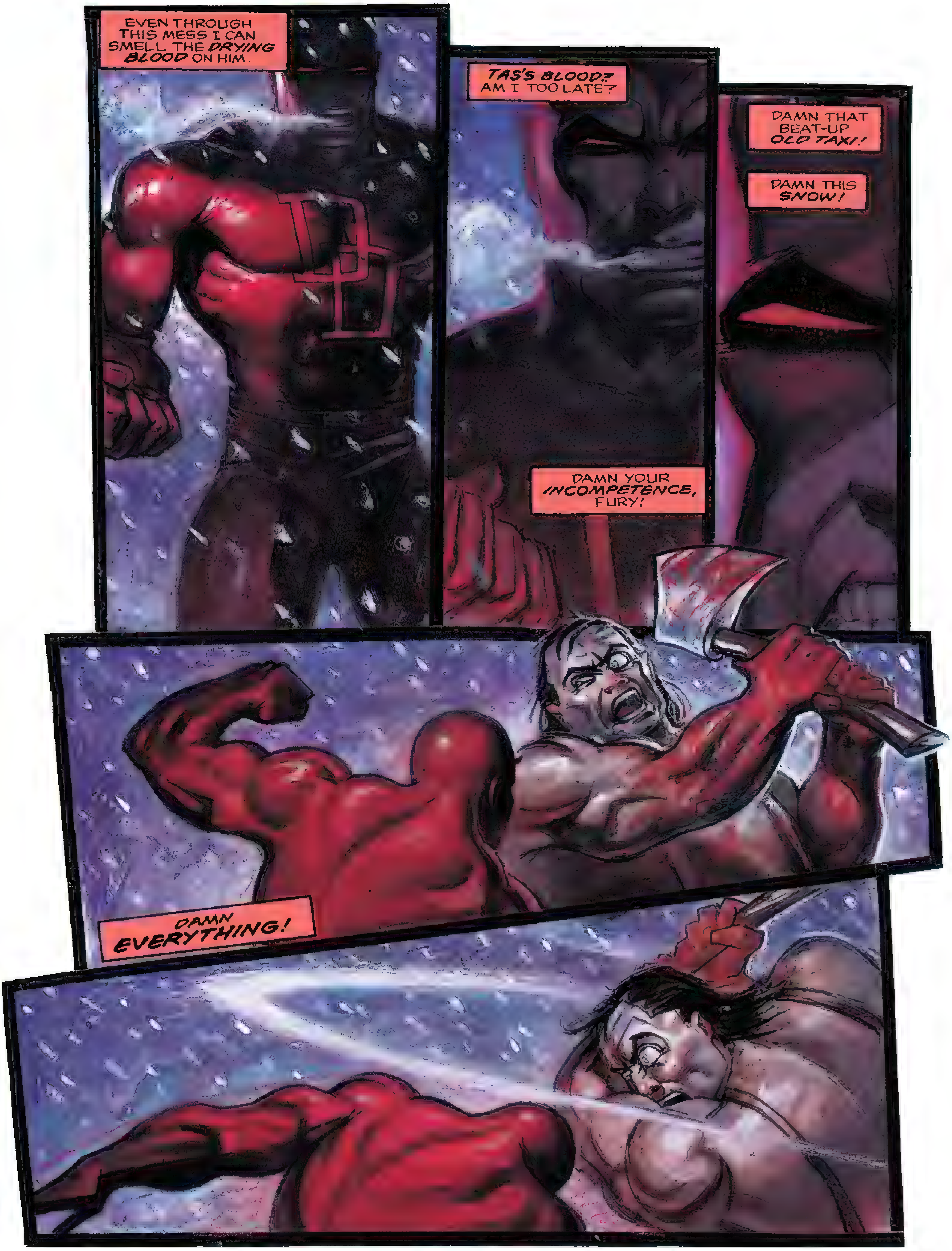

"THIS SHACK IS HIS STAGE. HE BUILT IT AND CHERISHES IT.
"HE RELISHES THE DRAMATIC BUILD-UP, THE LIFE AND DEATH SUSPENSE.
"BUT WHAT HE LOVES MORE THAN ANYTHING IS...
"...A GOOD CLIMAX!"

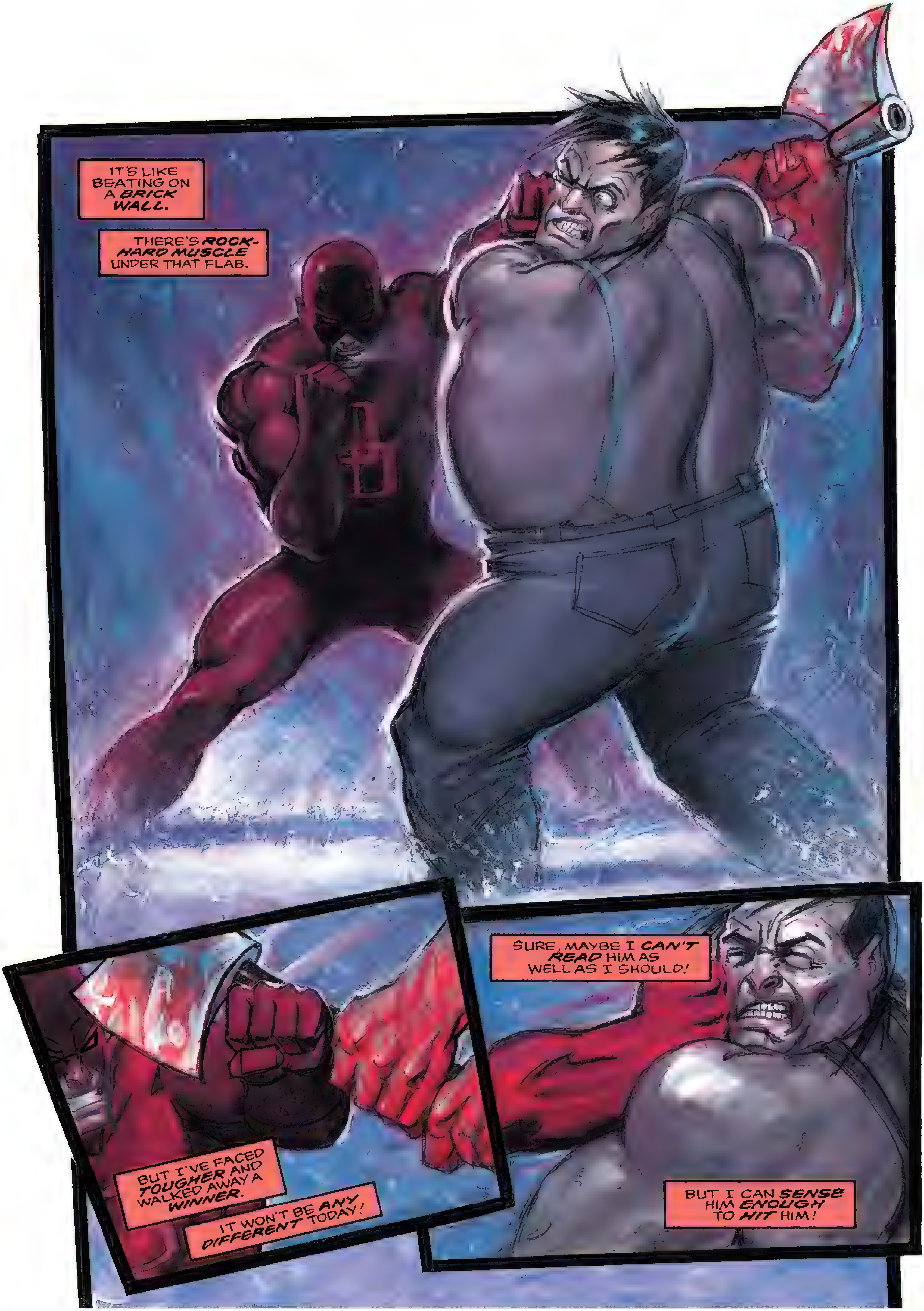

AND THEN THERE WAS ONE.
MATT, WHERE ARE YOU?
CHARLIE, ME BOY, WE'VE GOT COMPANY ON THE WAY.

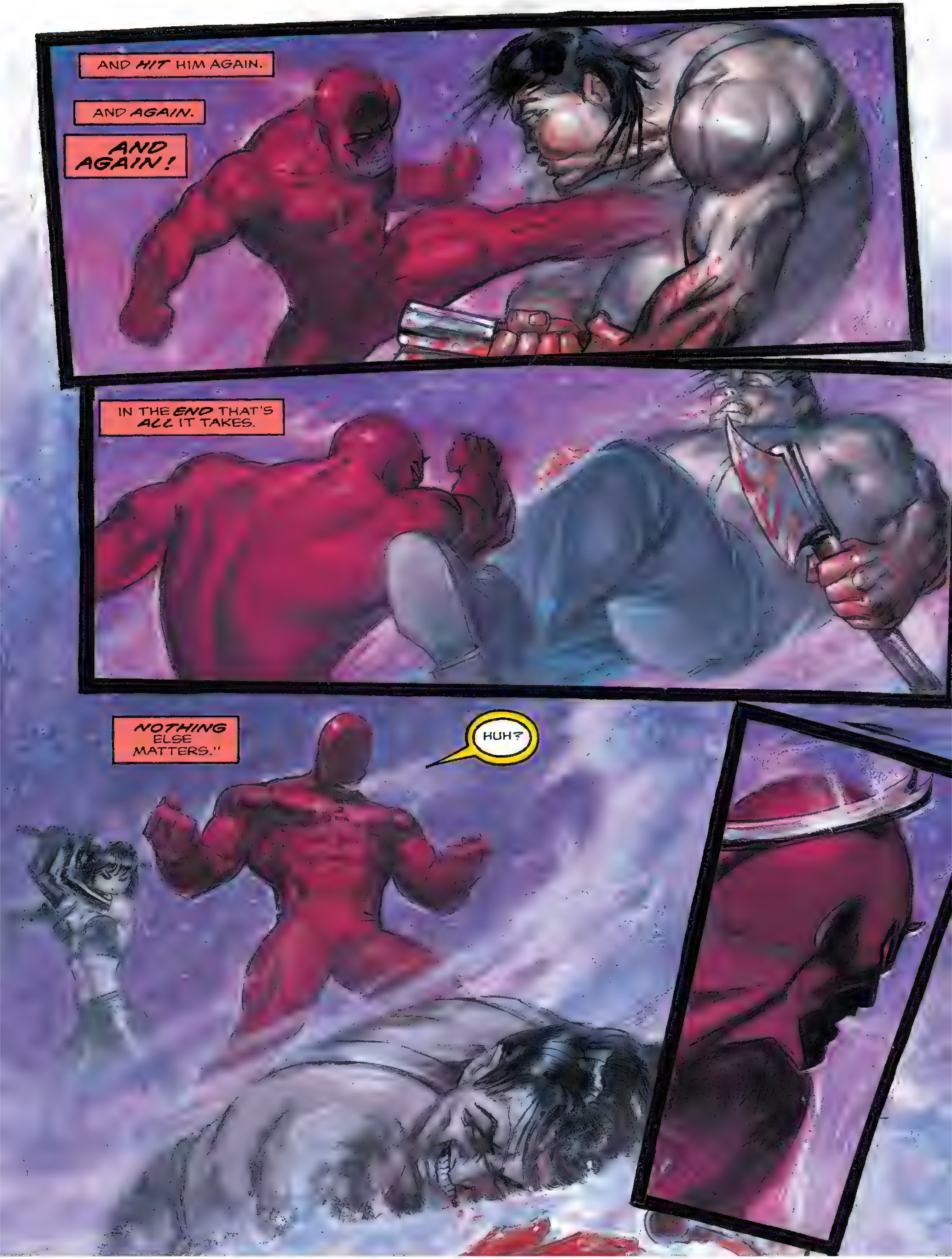

GOD HELP ME!
I WAS SO BUSY NOT THINKING ABOUT MY WRISTS I BETRAYED MATT!
KNEW HE'D BACK ME UP EVEN THOUGH HE NEVER SAID ANYTHING.
HAVE TO USE THIS BLUNDER TO MY ADVANTAGE.

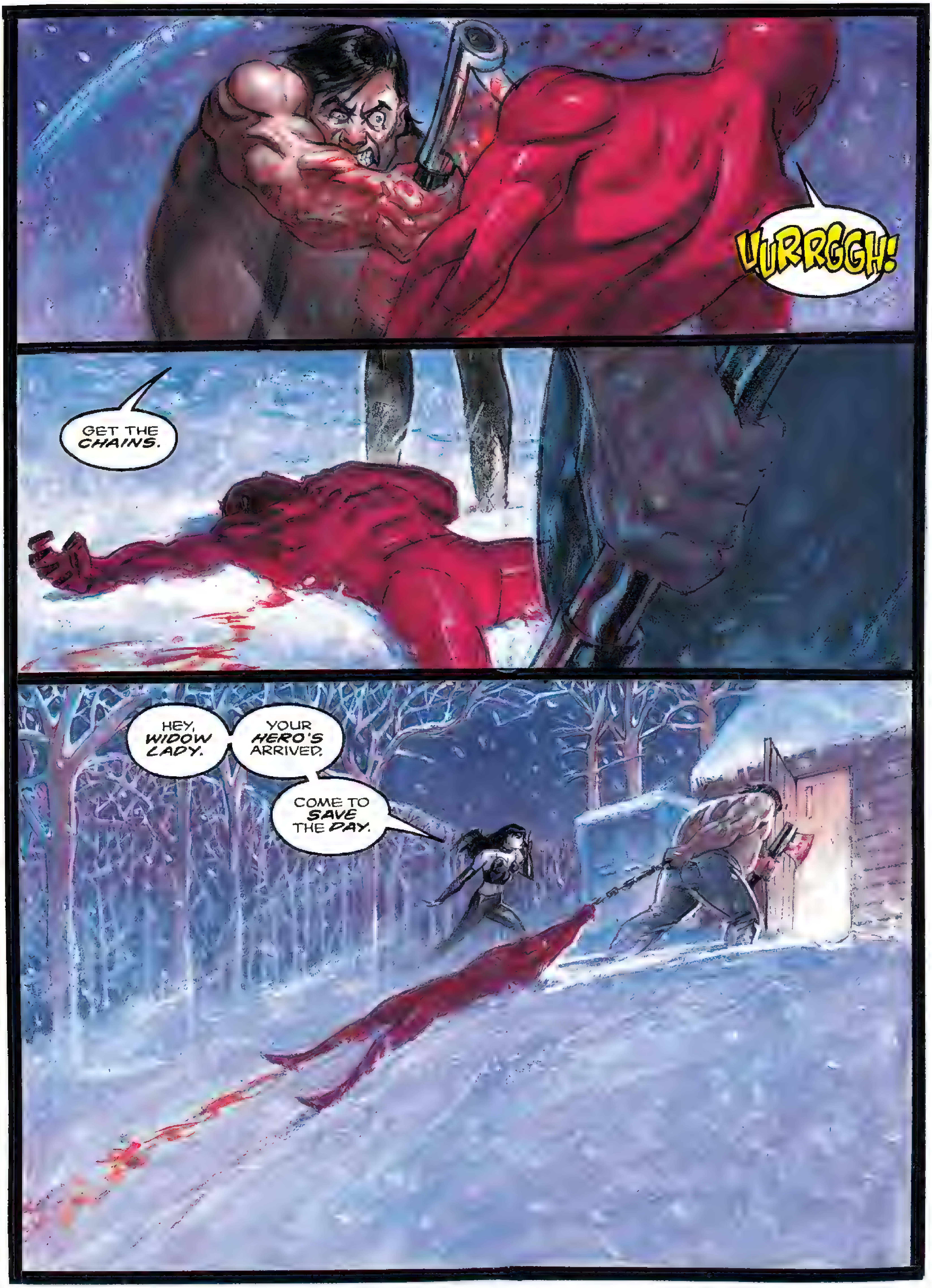

ALMOST THERE!
BLIP! BLIP! BLIP!
BUT WILL I BE OF ANY USE WHEN I FINALLY ARRIVE?
SO CHILLED AND STIFF.
AND THE COLD, SNOW AND WIND ARE THOROUGHLY SCREWING UP MY HYPER SENSES.
BUMPED INTO THREE TREES SO FAR.
GOT TO PULL IT TOGETHER.
TAS NEEDS ME.
CAN'T FAIL HER NOW.
WHAT?

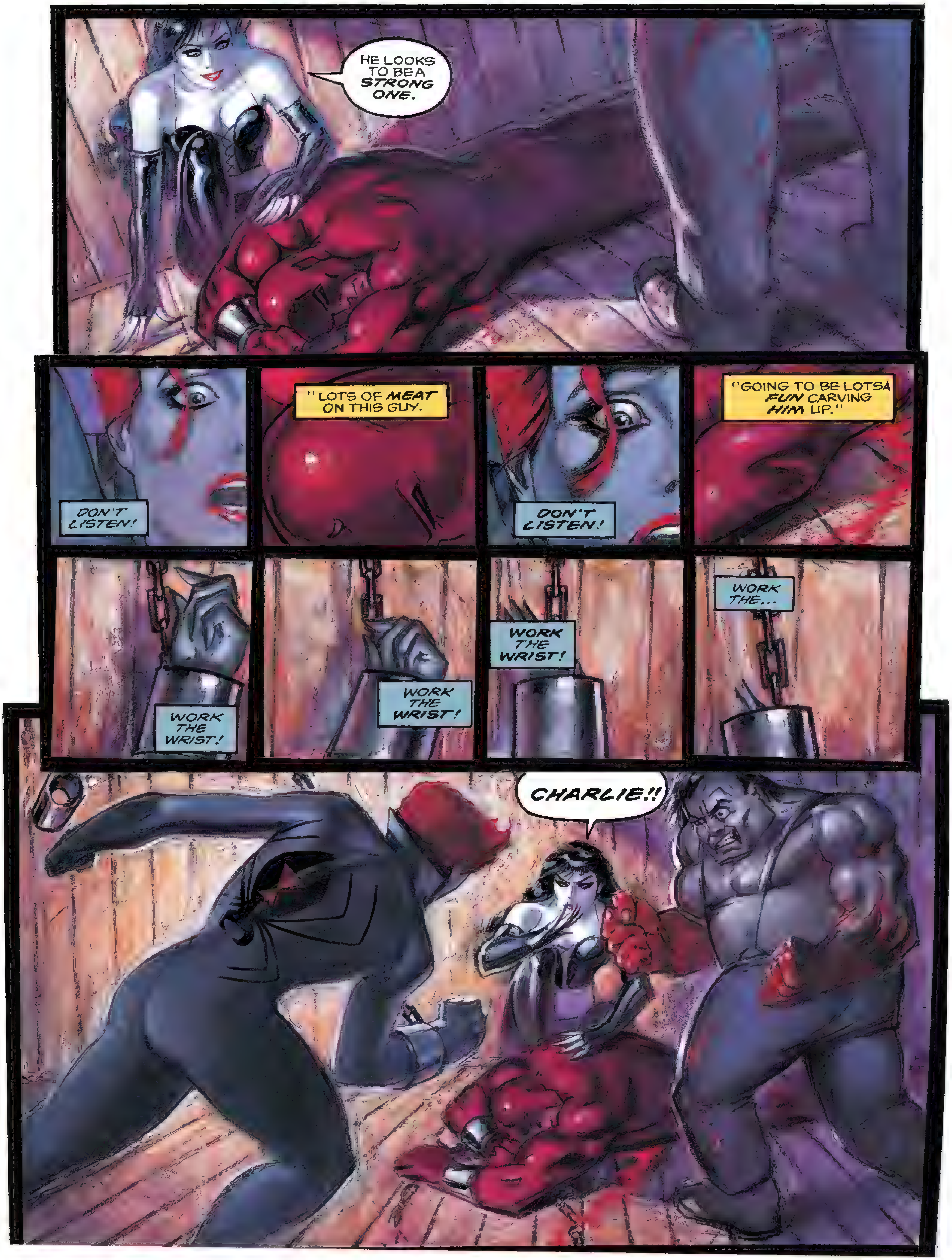


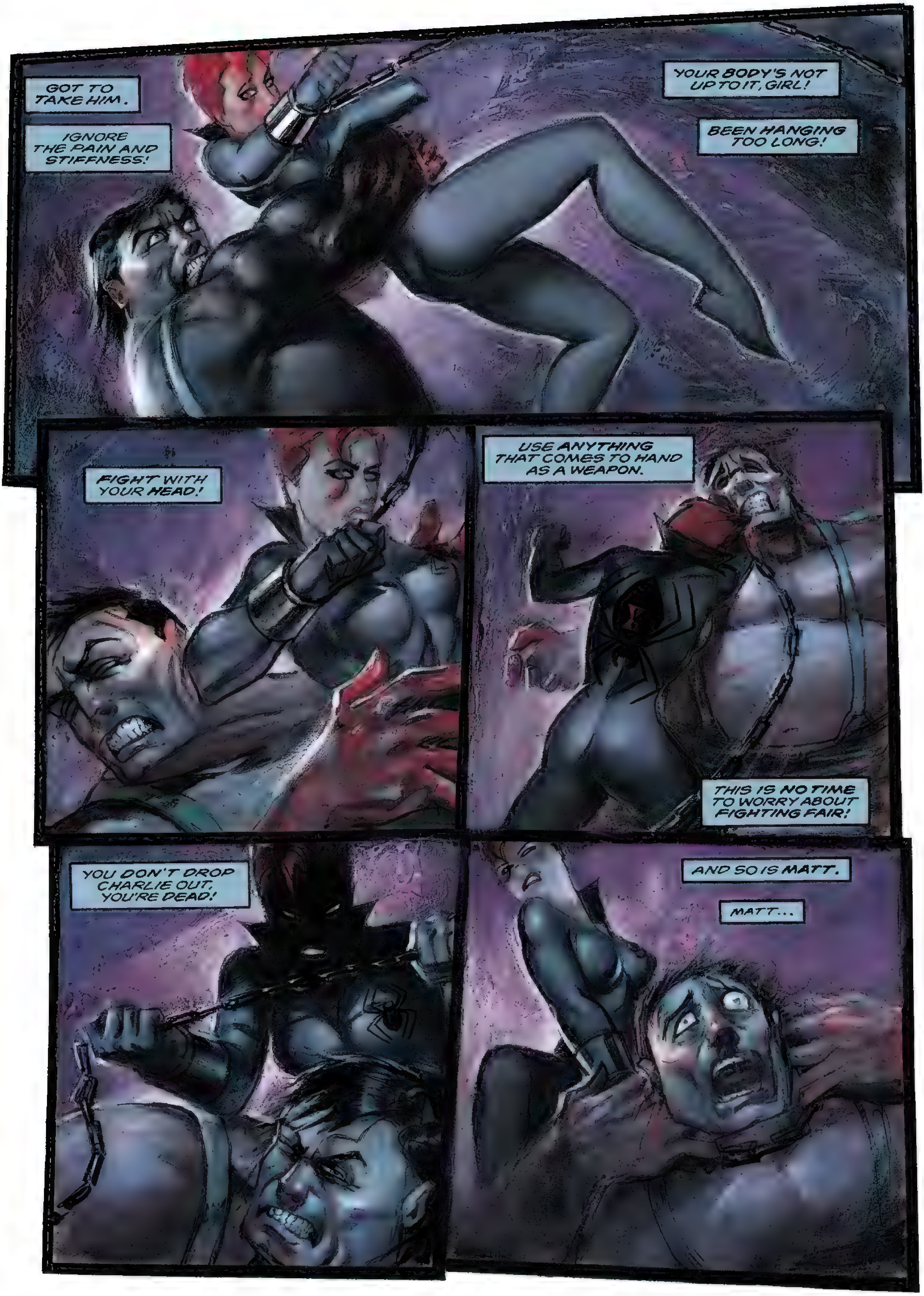

EVEN THROUGH THIS MESS I CAN SMELL THE *DRYING BLOOD* ON HIM.
TAS'S BLOOD? AM I TOO LATE?
DAMN THAT BEAT-UP *OLD TAXI!*
DAMN THIS *SNOW!*
DAMN YOUR *INCOMPETENCE,* FURY!
DAMN EVERYTHING!


IT'S LIKE BEATING ON A BRICK WALL.
THERE'S ROCK-HARD MUSCLE UNDER THAT FLAB.
BUT I'VE FACED TOUGHER AND WALKED AWAY A WINNER.
IT WON'T BE ANY DIFFERENT TODAY!
SURE, MAYBE I CAN'T READ HIM AS WELL AS I SHOULD!
BUT I CAN SENSE HIM ENOUGH TO HIT HIM!

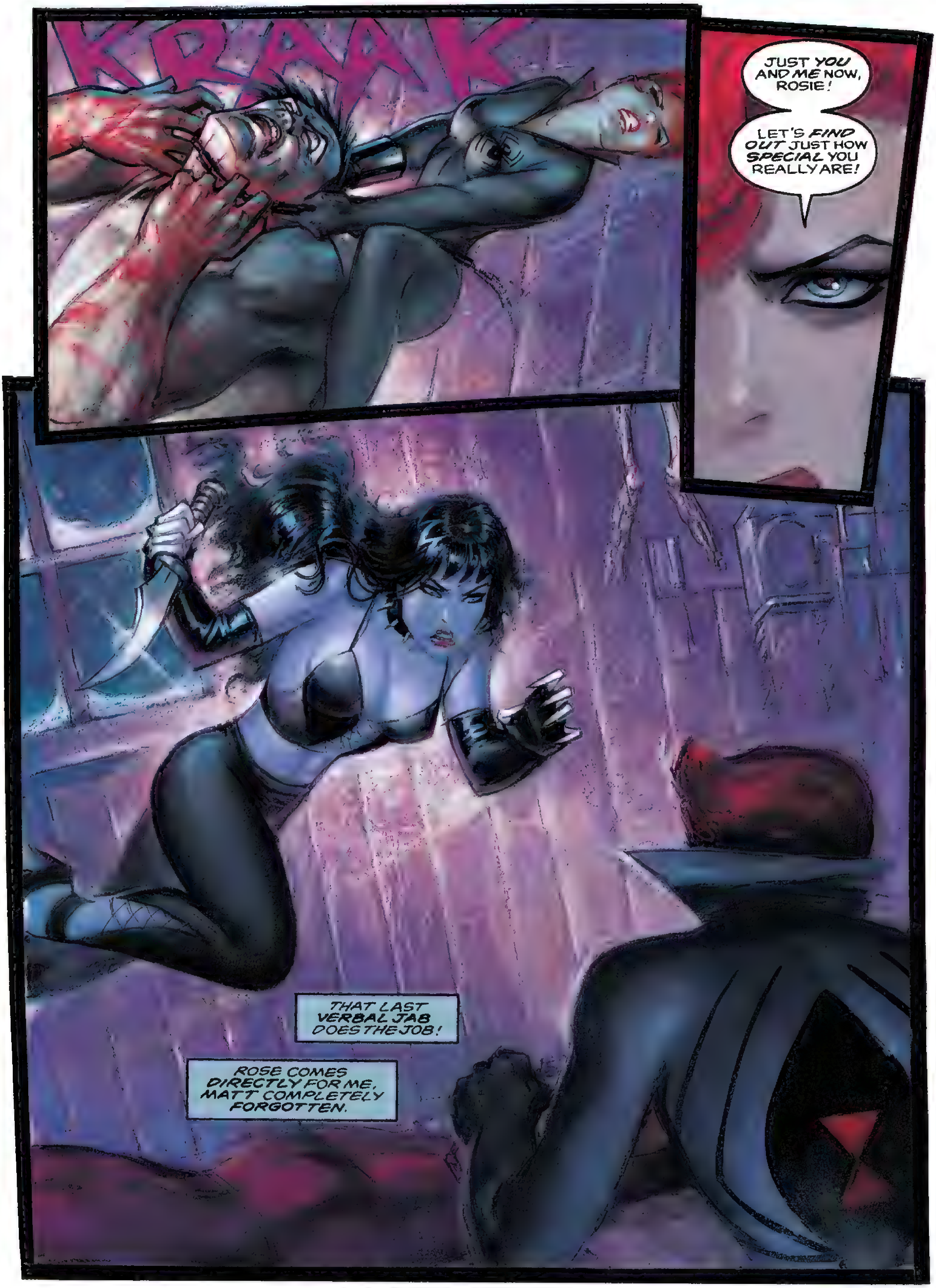

AND *HIT* HIM AGAIN.
AND *AGAIN.*
AND AGAIN!
IN THE *END* THAT'S *ALL* IT TAKES.
NOTHING ELSE MATTERS."
HUH?

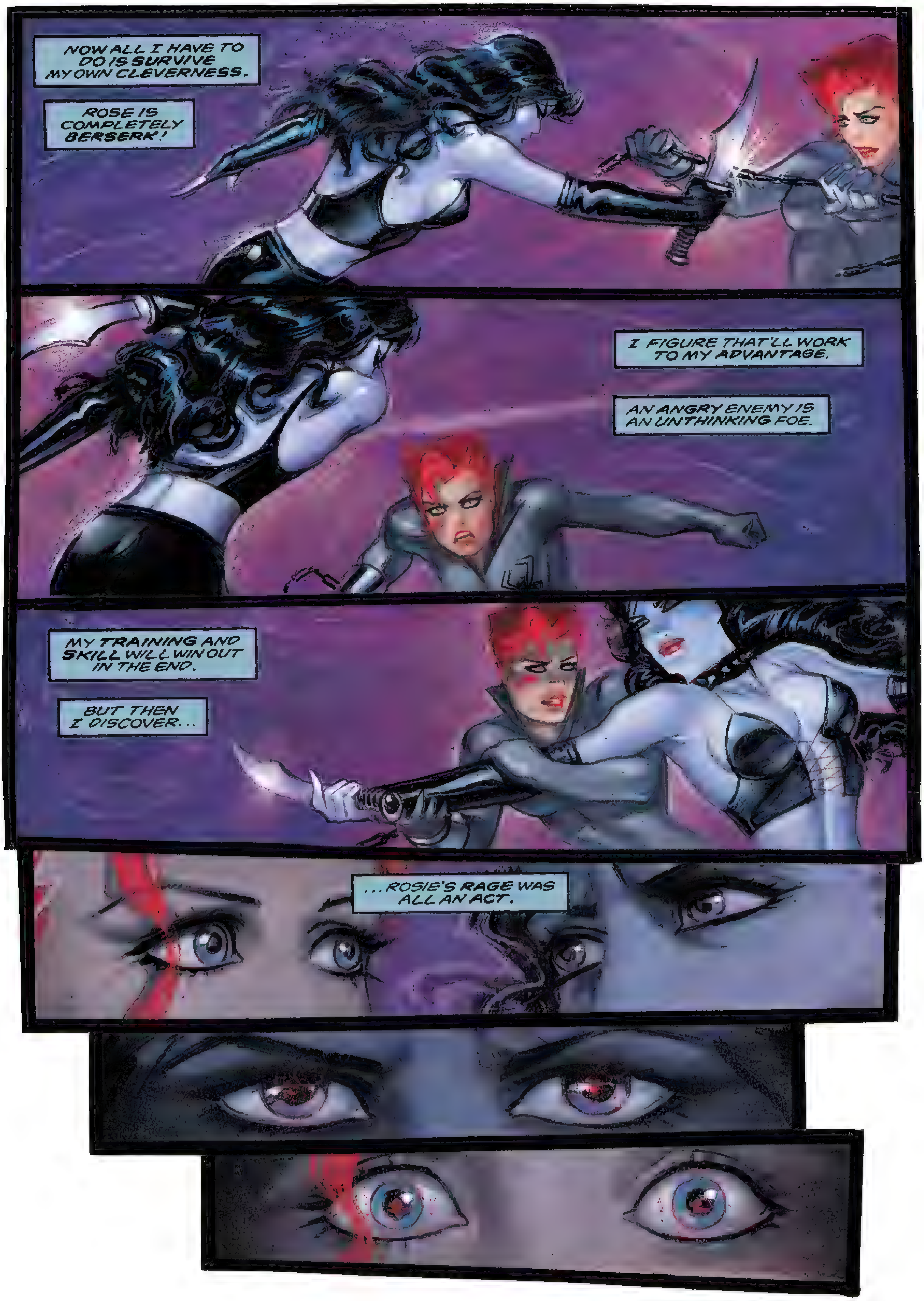

UURRGGH!
GET THE *CHAINS.*
HEY, *WIDOW LADY.*
YOUR *HERO'S* ARRIVED.
COME TO *SAVE* THE *DAY.*

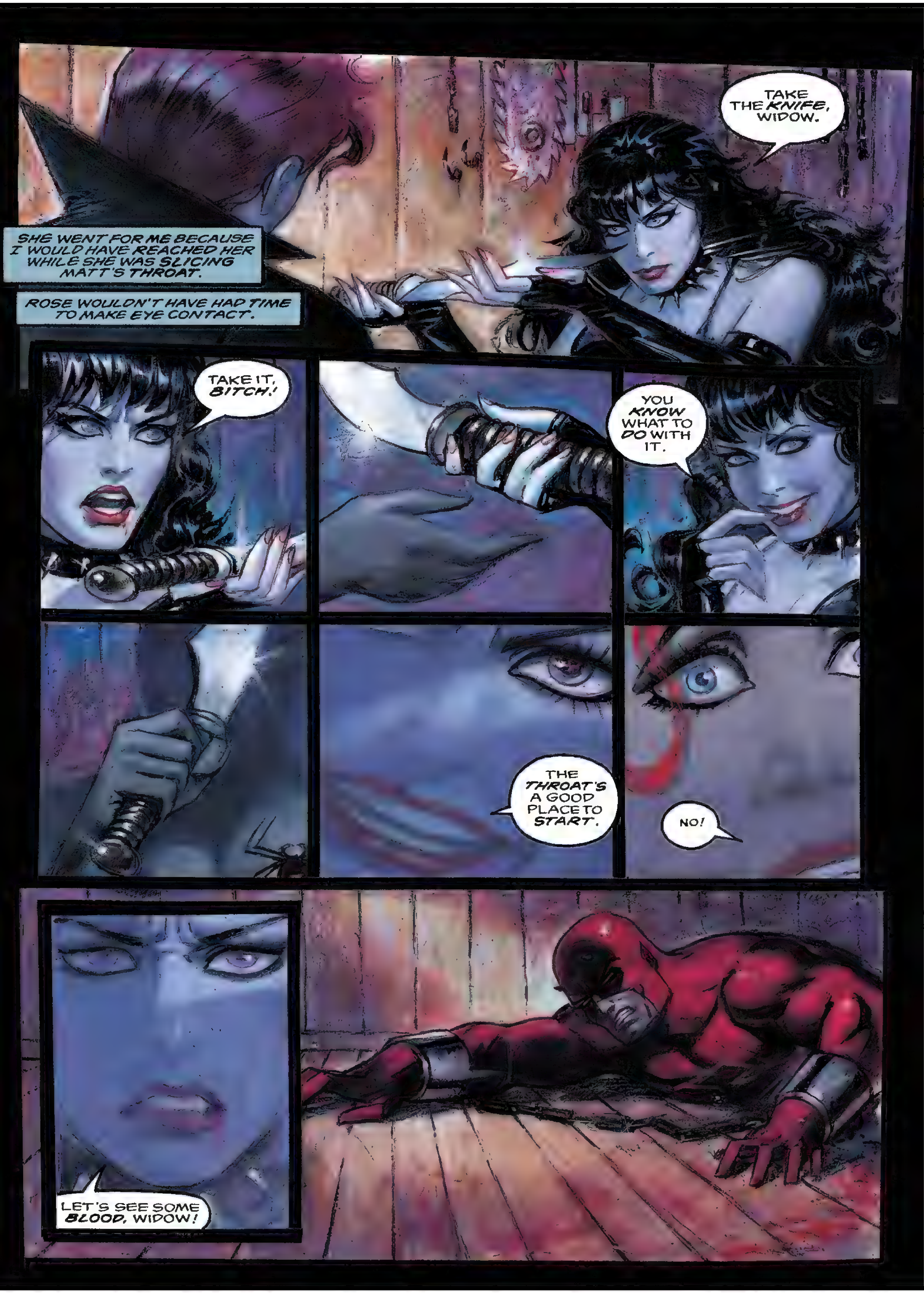

HE LOOKS TO BE A STRONG ONE.
DON'T LISTEN!
"LOTS OF MEAT ON THIS GUY.
DON'T LISTEN!
"GOING TO BE LOTSA FUN CARVING HIM UP."
WORK THE WRIST!
WORK THE WRIST!
WORK THE WRIST!
WORK THE...
CHARLIE!!

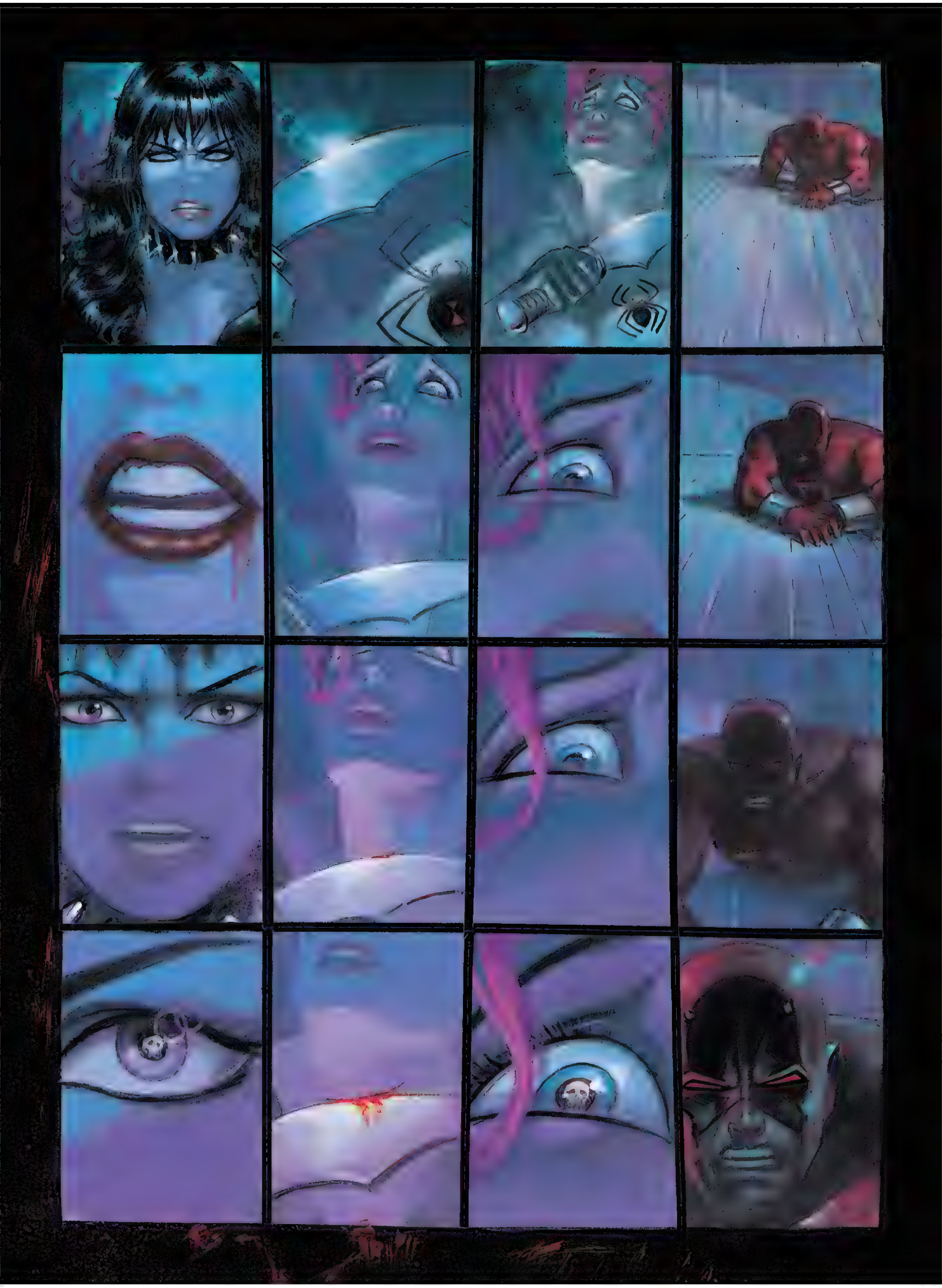

GOT TO TAKE HIM.
IGNORE THE PAIN AND STIFFNESS!
YOUR BODY'S NOT UP TO IT, GIRL!
BEEN HANGING TOO LONG!
FIGHT WITH YOUR **HEAD**!
USE **ANYTHING** THAT COMES TO HAND AS A WEAPON.
THIS IS **NO TIME** TO WORRY ABOUT FIGHTING FAIR!
YOU **DON'T** DROP CHARLIE OUT, YOU'RE **DEAD**!
AND SO IS **MATT**.
MATT...

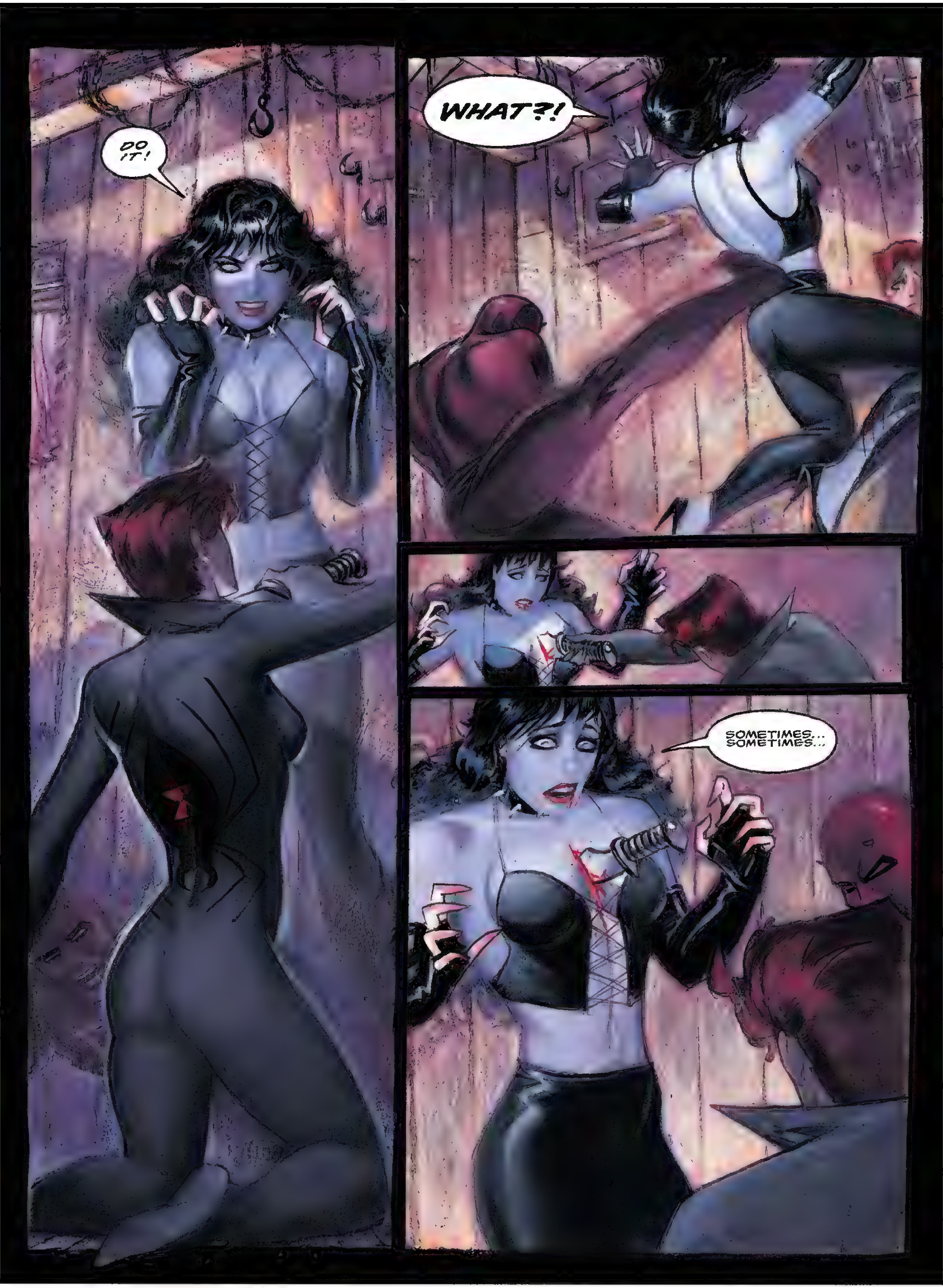
...IS ABOUT TO GET A *NEW SMILE*.
LET CHARLIE *LOOSE* AND WE'LL *WORK* THIS OUT.
THEN *MATT* AND *I* BOTH *DIE* HORRIBLY.
OH, MATT...
WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE, WIDOW?
PLAY OR PASS?
PLAY!

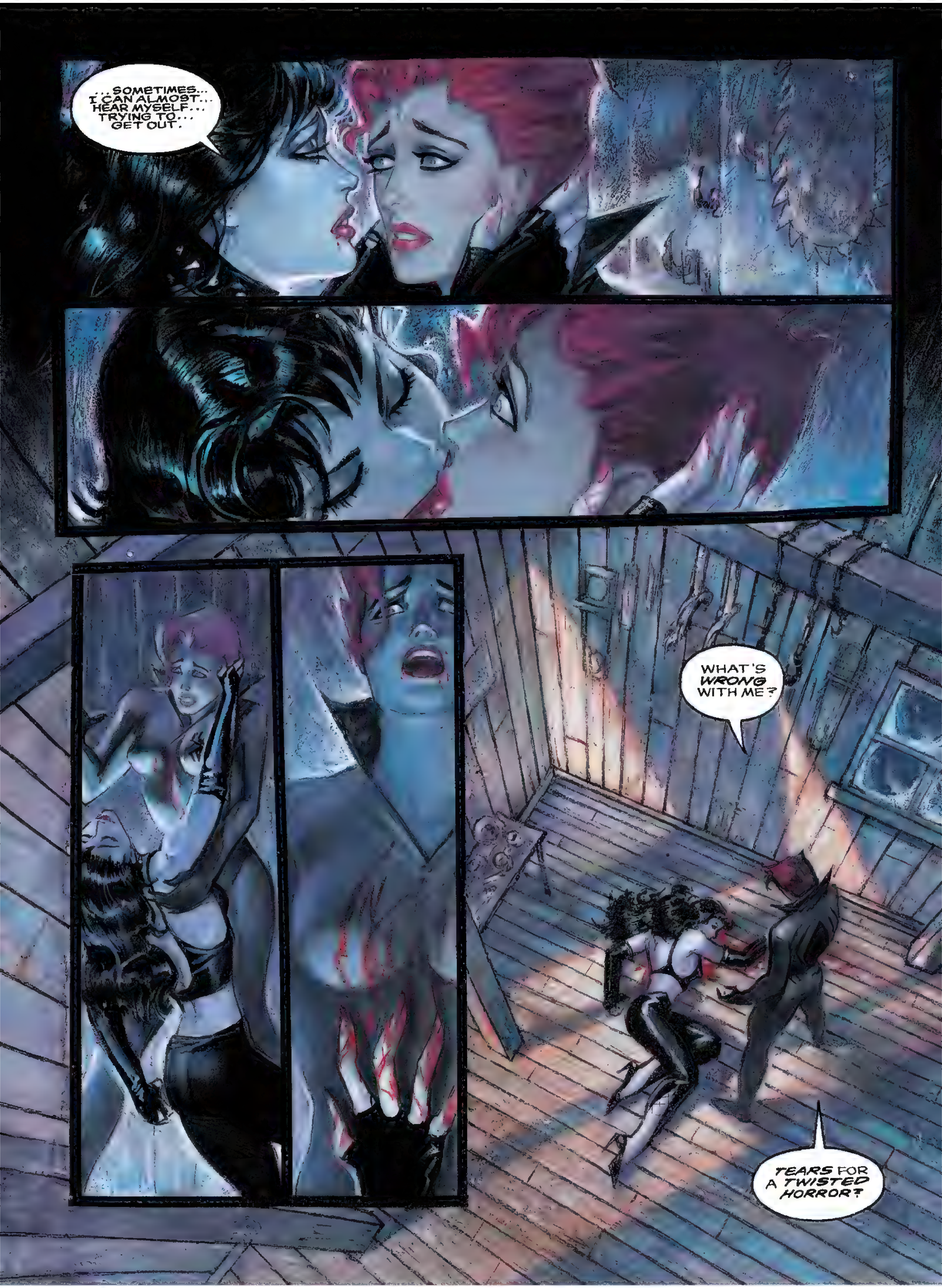

KRAAK
JUST YOU AND ME NOW, ROSIE!
LET'S FIND OUT JUST HOW SPECIAL YOU REALLY ARE!
THAT LAST VERBAL JAB DOES THE JOB!
ROSE COMES DIRECTLY FOR ME, MATT COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN.

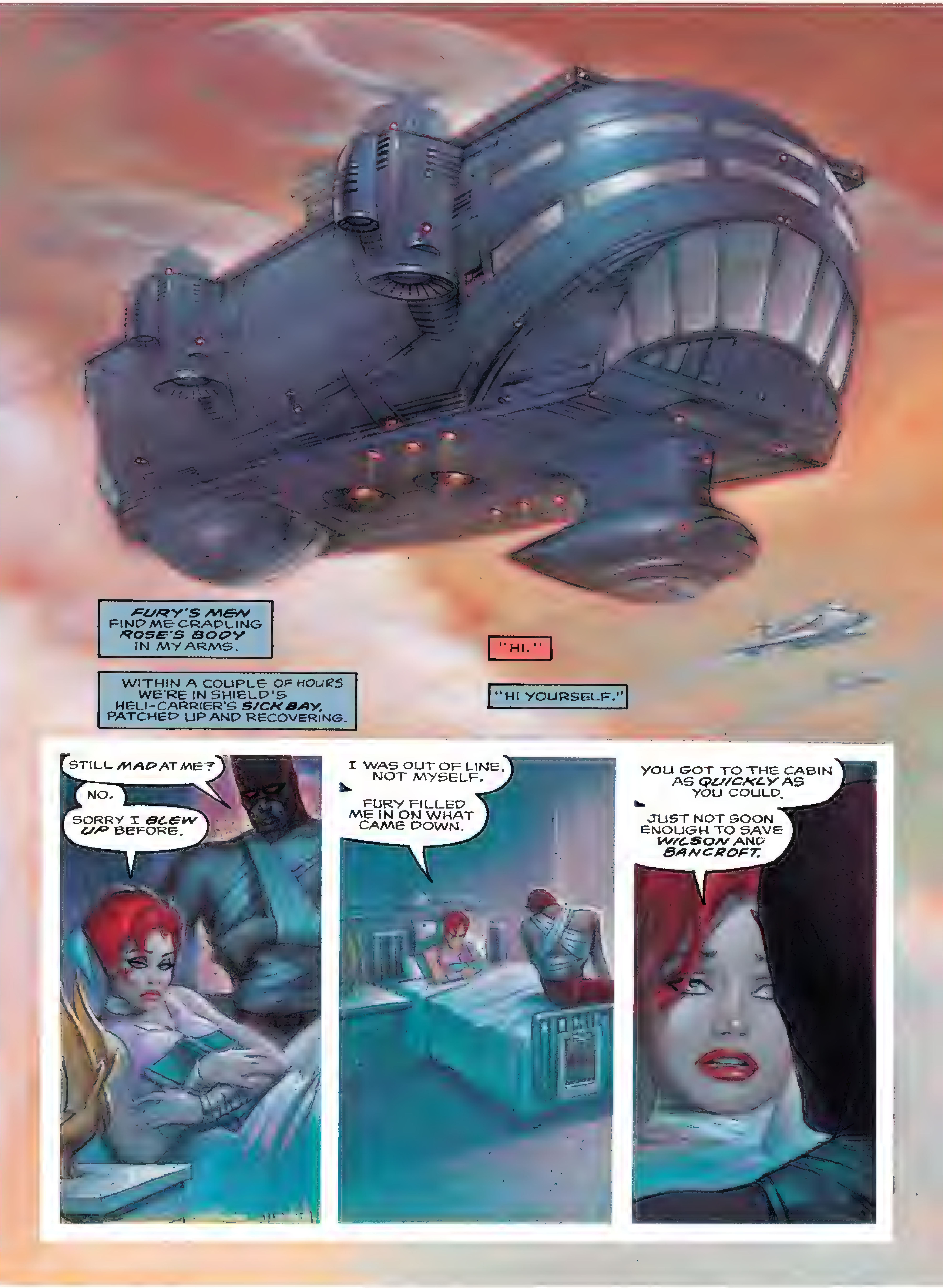

NOW ALL I HAVE TO DO IS SURVIVE MY OWN CLEVERNESS.
ROSE IS COMPLETELY BERSERK!
I FIGURE THAT'LL WORK TO MY ADVANTAGE.
AN ANGRY ENEMY IS AN UNTHINKING FOE.
MY TRAINING AND SKILL WILL WIN OUT IN THE END.
BUT THEN I DISCOVER...
...ROSIE'S RAGE WAS ALL AN ACT.

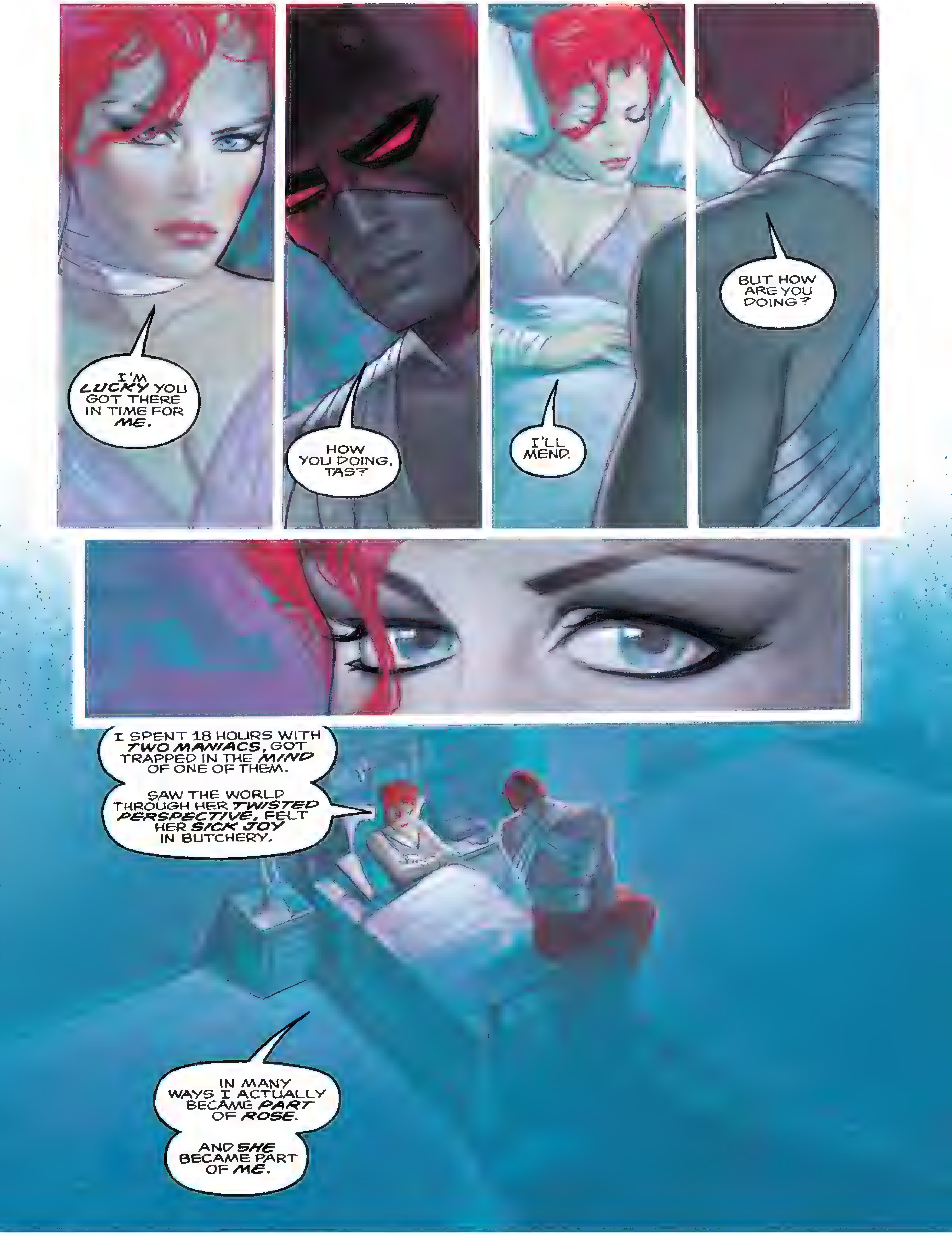

TAKE THE *KNIFE,* WIDOW.
SHE WENT FOR ME BECAUSE I WOULD HAVE REACHED HER WHILE SHE WAS SLICING MATT'S THROAT.
ROSE WOULDN'T HAVE HAD TIME TO MAKE EYE CONTACT.
TAKE IT, *BITCH!*
YOU *KNOW* WHAT TO *DO* WITH IT.
THE *THROAT'S* A GOOD PLACE TO *START*.
NO!
LET'S SEE SOME *BLOOD*, WIDOW!

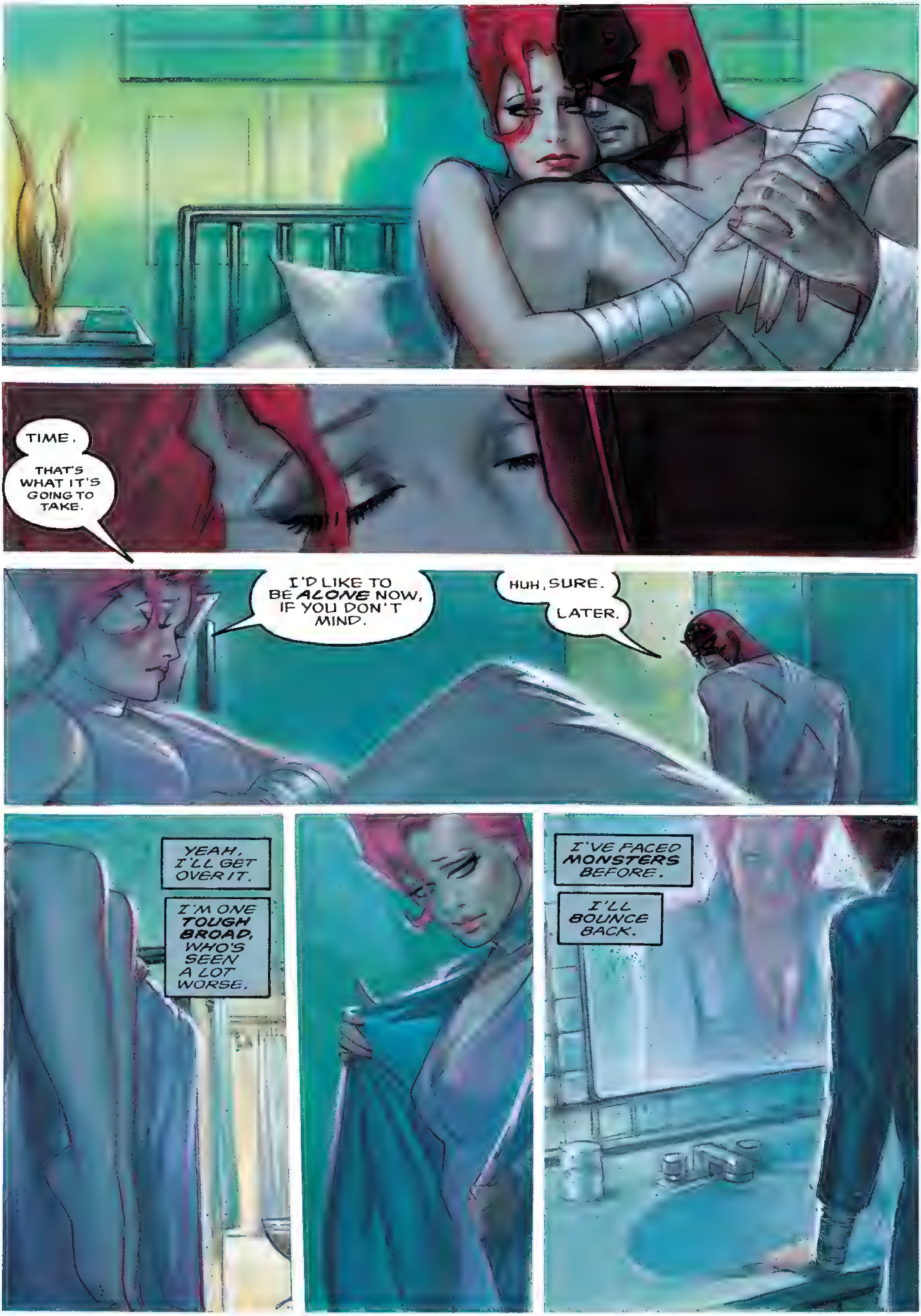


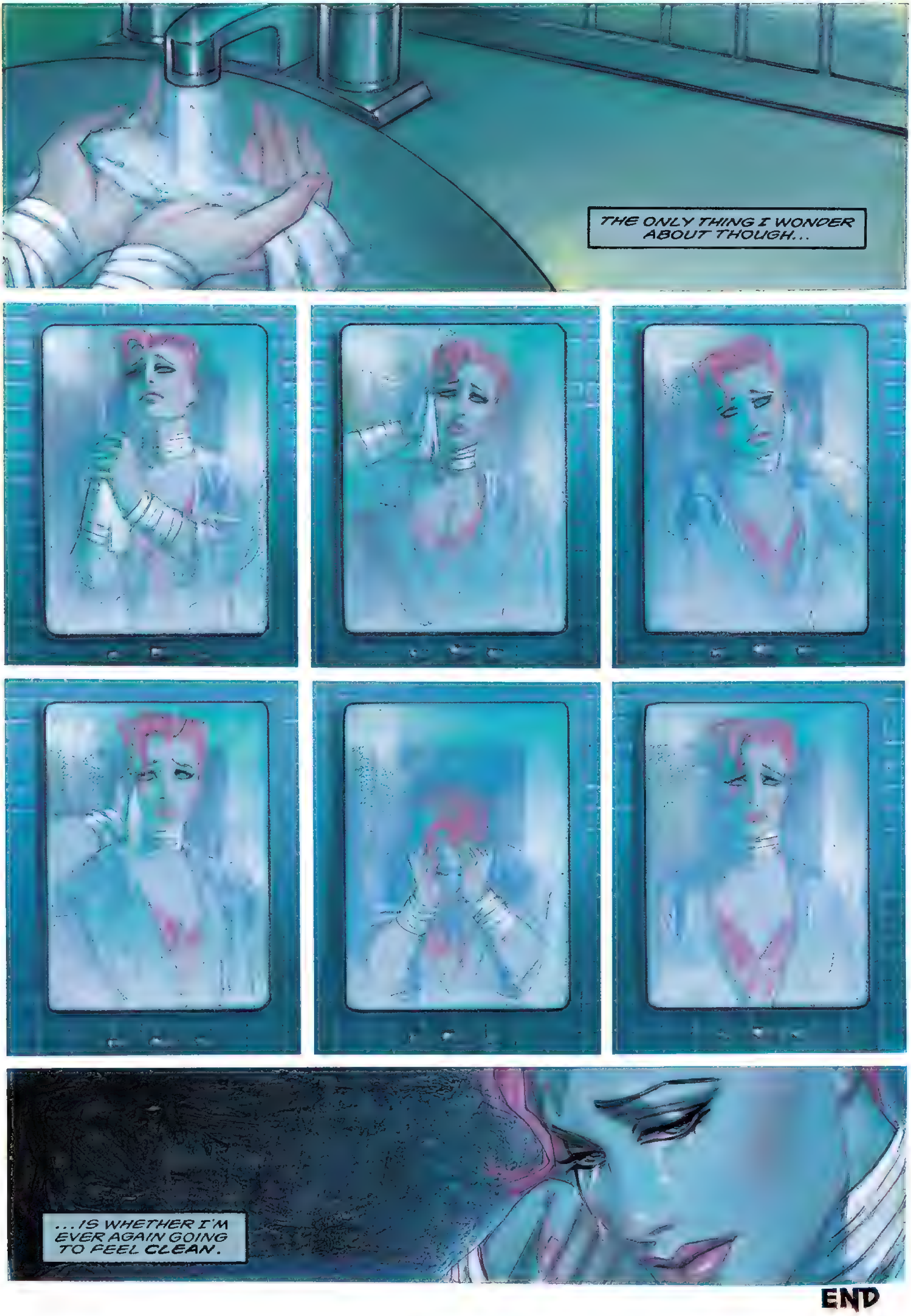

DO IT!
WHAT?!
SOMETIMES... SOMETIMES...


...SOMETIMES... I CAN ALMOST... HEAR MYSELF... TRYING TO... GET OUT.
WHAT'S *WRONG* WITH ME?
TEARS FOR A *TWISTED HORROR?*


FURY'S MEN FIND ME CRADLING ROSE'S BODY IN MY ARMS.
WITHIN A COUPLE OF HOURS WE'RE IN SHIELD'S HELI-CARRIER'S SICK BAY, PATCHED UP AND RECOVERING.
"HI."
"HI YOURSELF."
STILL MAD AT ME?
NO.
SORRY I BLEW UP BEFORE.
I WAS OUT OF LINE. NOT MYSELF.
FURY FILLED ME IN ON WHAT CAME DOWN.
YOU GOT TO THE CABIN AS QUICKLY AS YOU COULD.
JUST NOT SOON ENOUGH TO SAVE WILSON AND BANCROFT.


I'M *LUCKY* YOU GOT THERE IN TIME FOR *ME.*
HOW YOU DOING, TAS?
I'LL MEND.
BUT HOW ARE YOU DOING?
I SPENT 18 HOURS WITH *TWO MANIACS,* GOT TRAPPED IN THE *MIND* OF ONE OF THEM.
SAW THE WORLD THROUGH HER *TWISTED PERSPECTIVE,* FELT HER *SICK JOY* IN BUTCHERY.
IN MANY WAYS I ACTUALLY BECAME *PART* OF *ROSE.*
AND *SHE* BECAME PART OF *ME.*


TIME. THAT'S WHAT IT'S GOING TO TAKE.
I'D LIKE TO BE ALONE NOW, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
HUH, SURE. LATER.
YEAH, I'LL GET OVER IT.
I'M ONE TOUGH BROAD, WHO'S SEEN A LOT WORSE.
I'VE FACED MONSTERS BEFORE.
I'LL BOUNCE BACK.


THE ONLY THING I WONDER ABOUT THOUGH...
...IS WHETHER I'M EVER AGAIN GOING TO FEEL **CLEAN**.
END

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Life is fluid. Some 90% of us is made up of water. Without this precious liquid we are nothing. We cease to exist. We're dead. This water's carried around in thin-skinned sacks. We must all be insane to race recklessly about in a world filled with so many sharp and pointed dangers. That's just asking for trouble.

DAREDEVIL:

The man without fear.

BLACK WIDOW:

Beautiful and deadly master spy.

ABATTOIR:

Slaughterhouse.

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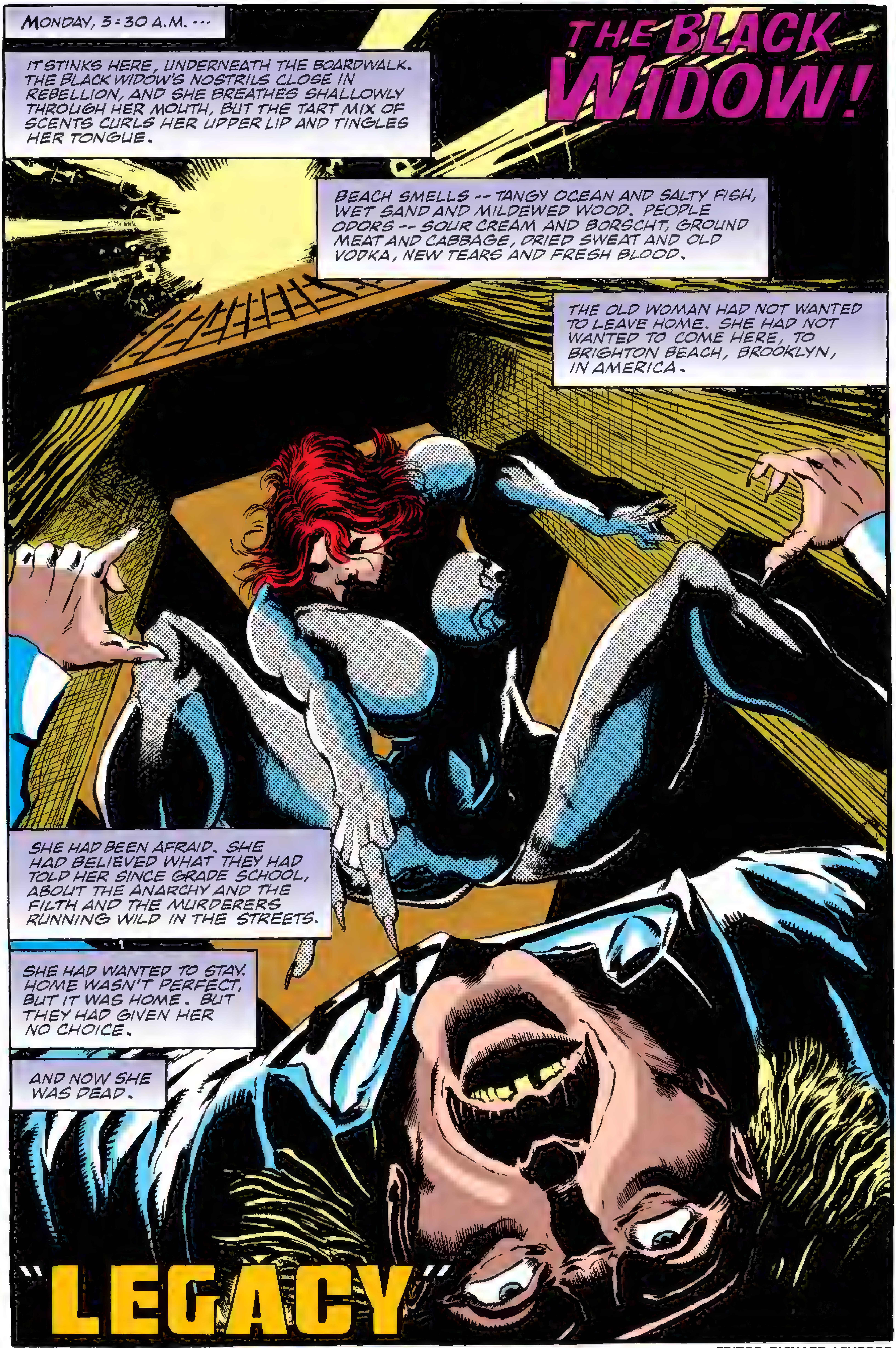
MONDAY, 3:30 A.M. ---
THE BLACK WIDOW!
IT STINKS HERE, UNDERNEATH THE BOARDWALK. THE BLACK WIDOW'S NOSTRILS CLOSE IN REBELLION, AND SHE BREATHES SHALLOWLY THROUGH HER MOUTH, BUT THE TART MIX OF SCENTS CURLS HER UPPER LIP AND TINGLES HER TONGUE.
BEACH SMELLS -- TANGY OCEAN AND SALTY FISH, WET SAND AND MILDEWED WOOD. PEOPLE ODORS -- SOUR CREAM AND BORSCHT, GROUND MEAT AND CABBAGE, DRIED SWEAT AND OLD VODKA, NEW TEARS AND FRESH BLOOD.
THE OLD WOMAN HAD NOT WANTED TO LEAVE HOME. SHE HAD NOT WANTED TO COME HERE, TO BRIGHTON BEACH, BROOKLYN, IN AMERICA.
SHE HAD BEEN AFRAID. SHE HAD BELIEVED WHAT THEY HAD TOLD HER SINCE GRADE SCHOOL, ABOUT THE ANARCHY AND THE FILTH AND THE MURDERERS RUNNING WILD IN THE STREETS.
SHE HAD WANTED TO STAY. HOME WASN'T PERFECT, BUT IT WAS HOME. BUT THEY HAD GIVEN HER NO CHOICE.
AND NOW SHE WAS DEAD.
"LEGACY"

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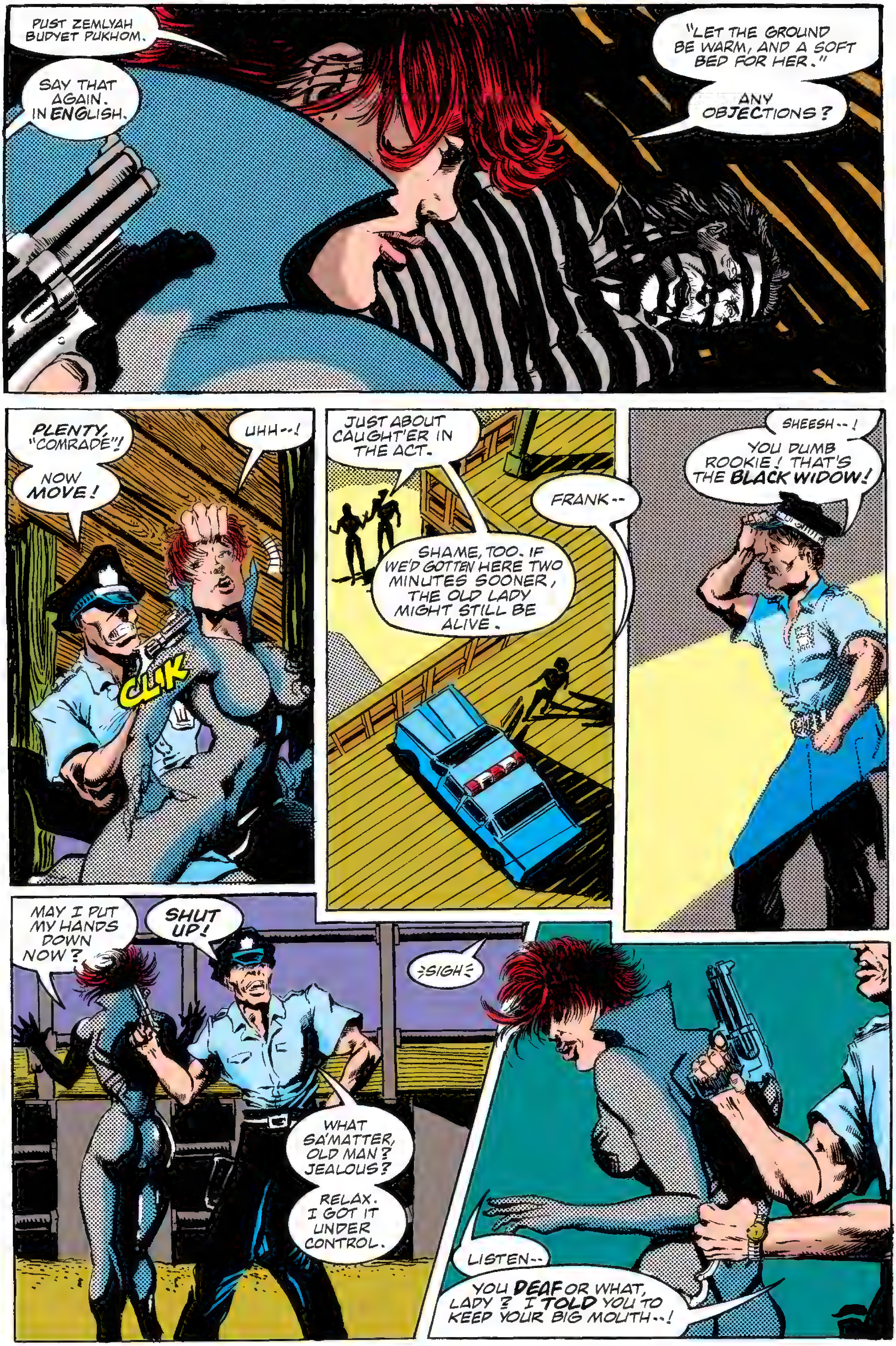
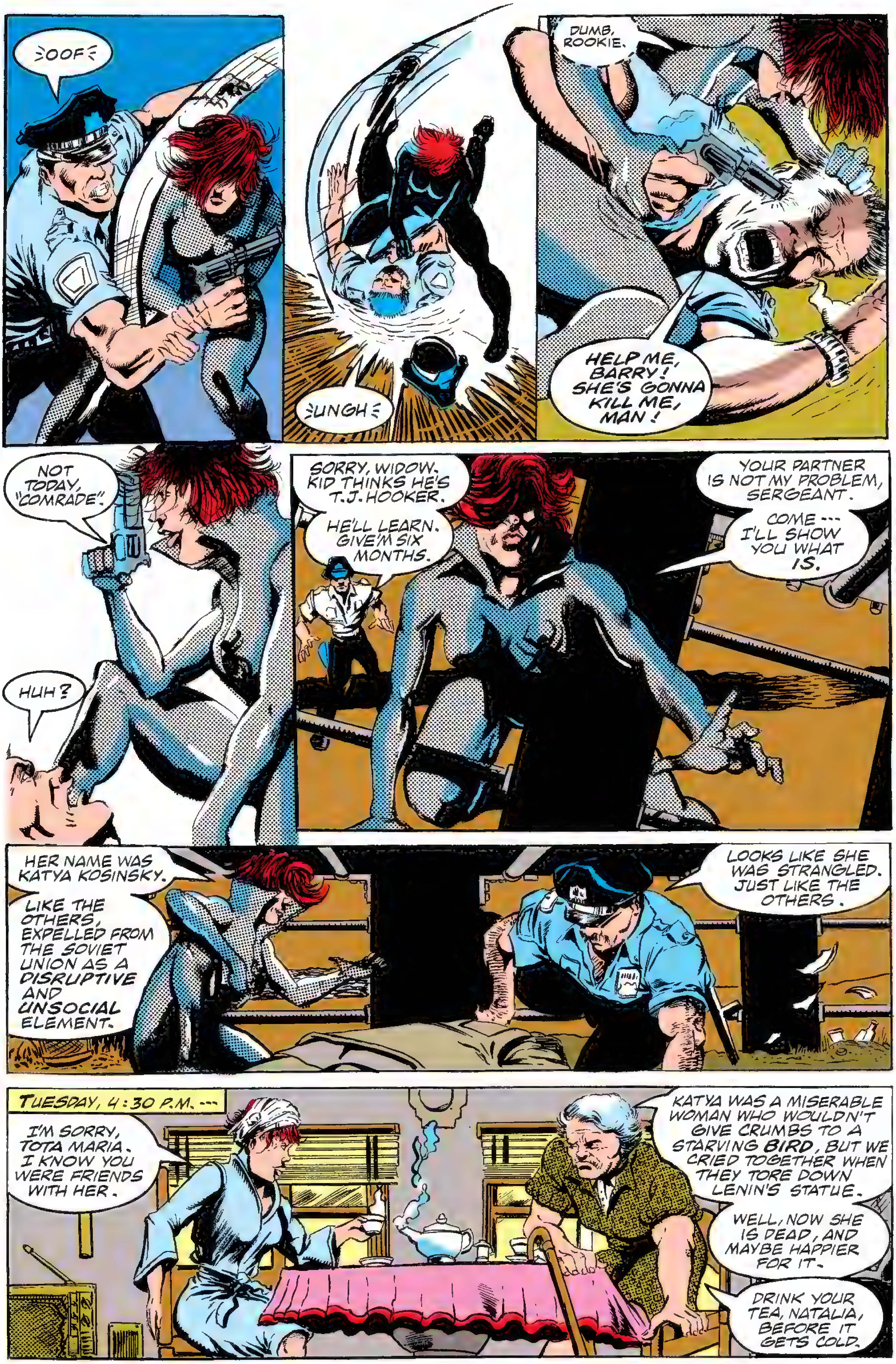
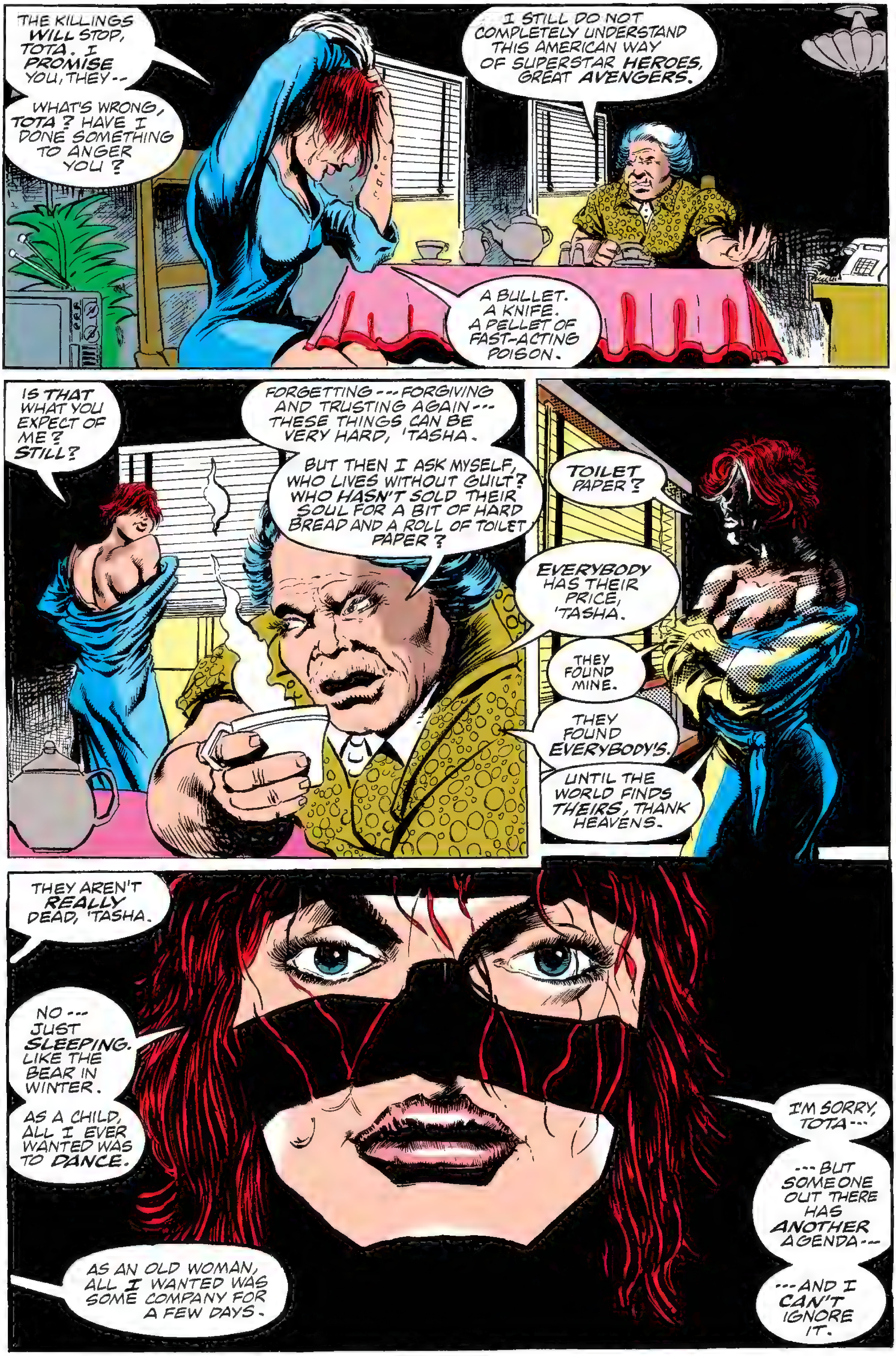
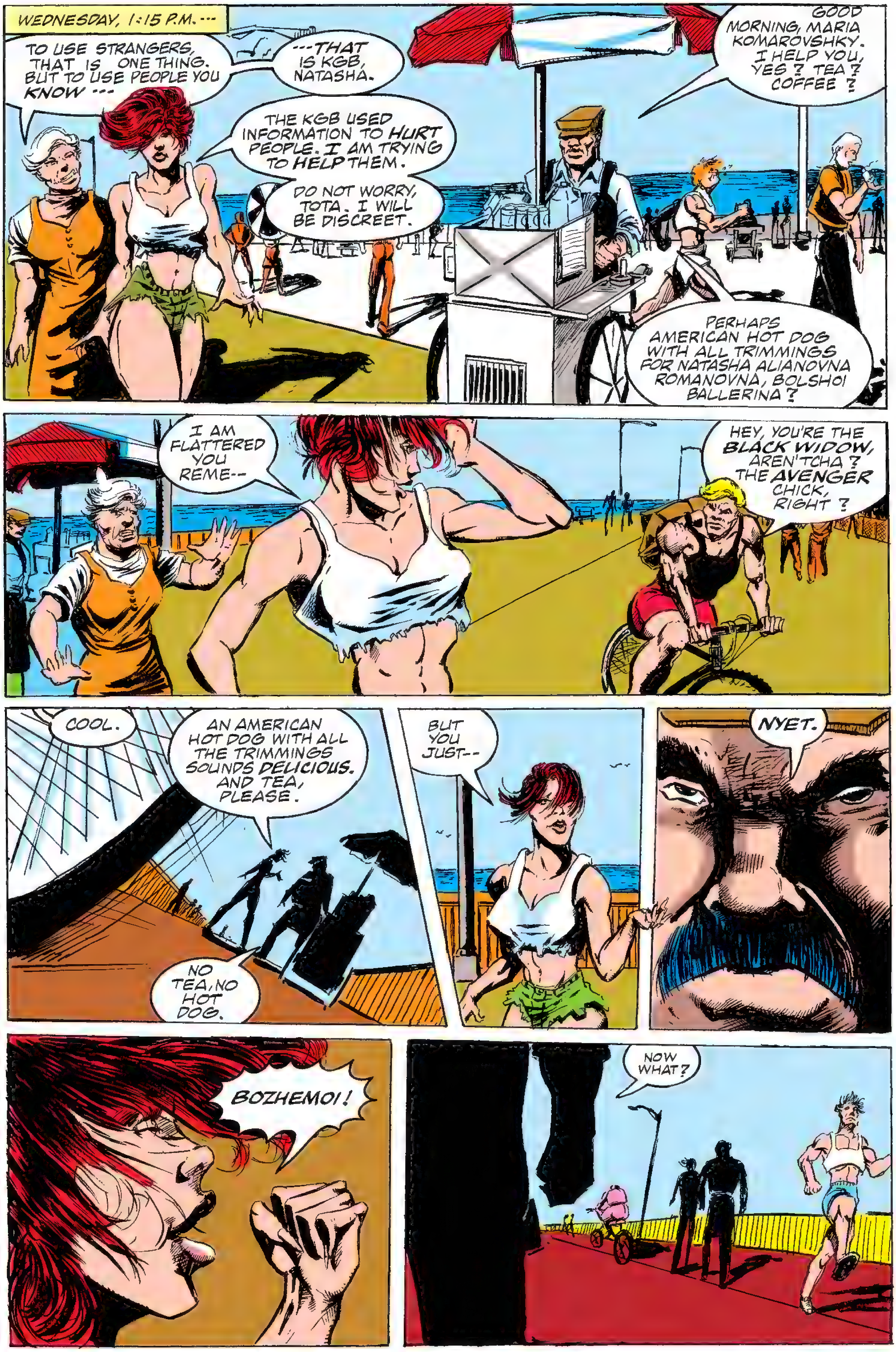
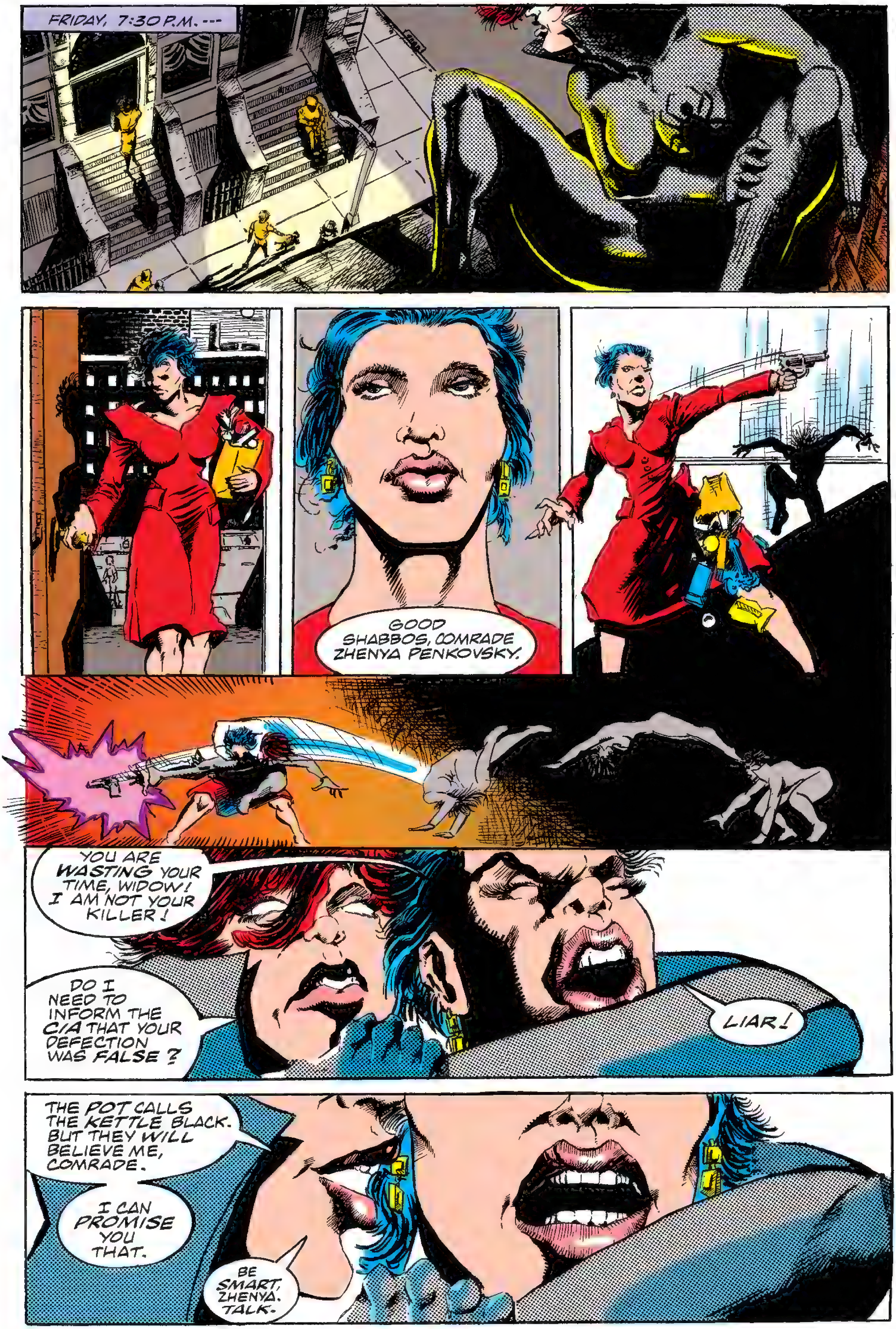
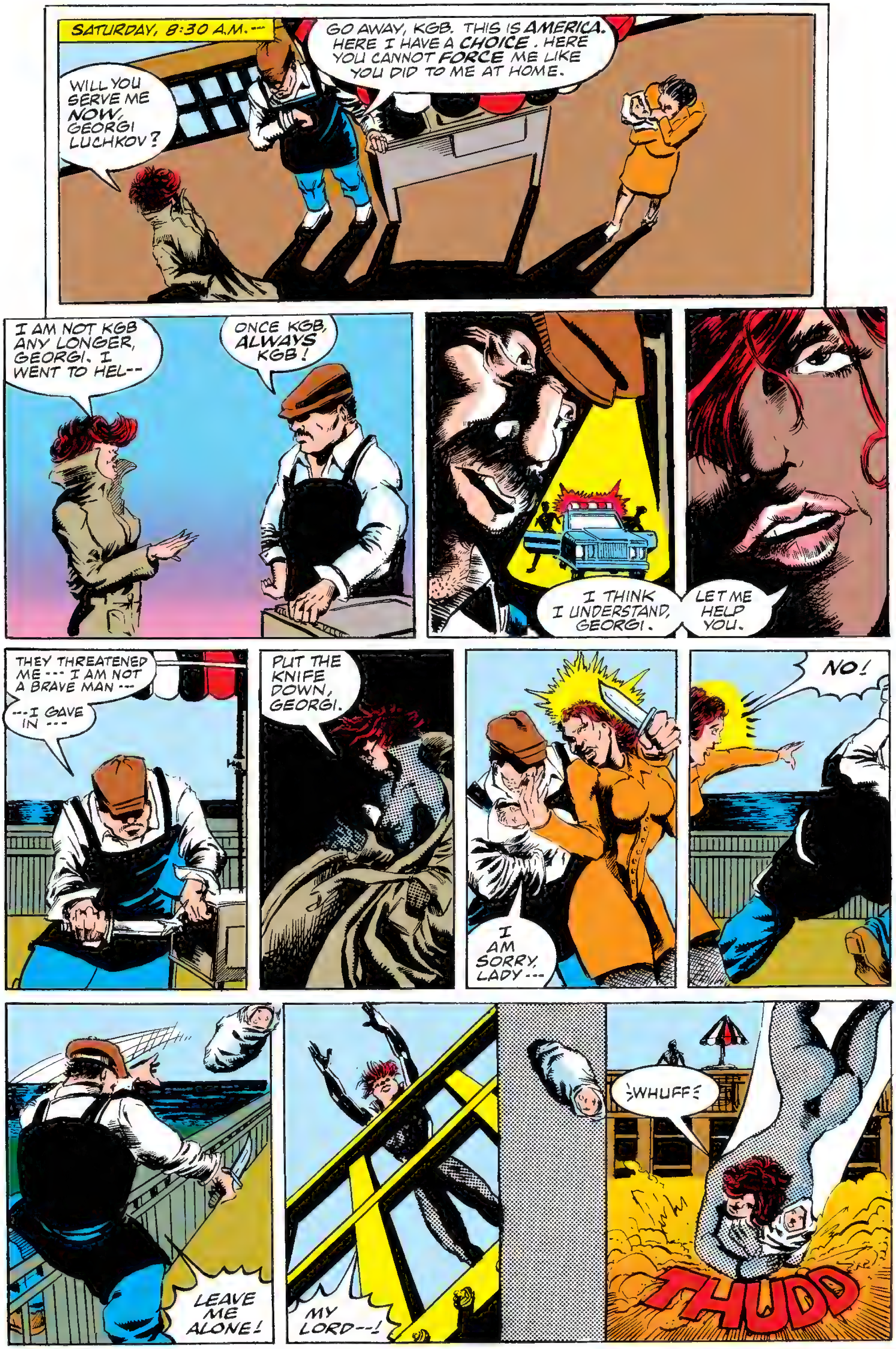

PUST ZEMLYAH BUDYET PUKHOM.
SAY THAT AGAIN. IN ENGLISH.
"LET THE GROUND BE WARM, AND A SOFT BED FOR HER."
ANY OBJECTIONS?
PLENTY, "COMRADE"!
NOW MOVE!
UHH--!
CLIK
JUST ABOUT CAUGHT'ER IN THE ACT.
SHAME, TOO. IF WE'D GOTTEN HERE TWO MINUTES SOONER, THE OLD LADY MIGHT STILL BE ALIVE.
FRANK--
SHEESH--!
YOU DUMB ROOKIE! THAT'S THE BLACK WIDOW!
MAY I PUT MY HANDS DOWN NOW?
SHUT UP!
SIGH
WHAT SA'MATTER, OLD MAN? JEALOUS?
RELAX. I GOT IT UNDER CONTROL.
LISTEN--
YOU DEAF OR WHAT, LADY? I TOLD YOU TO KEEP YOUR BIG MOUTH--!

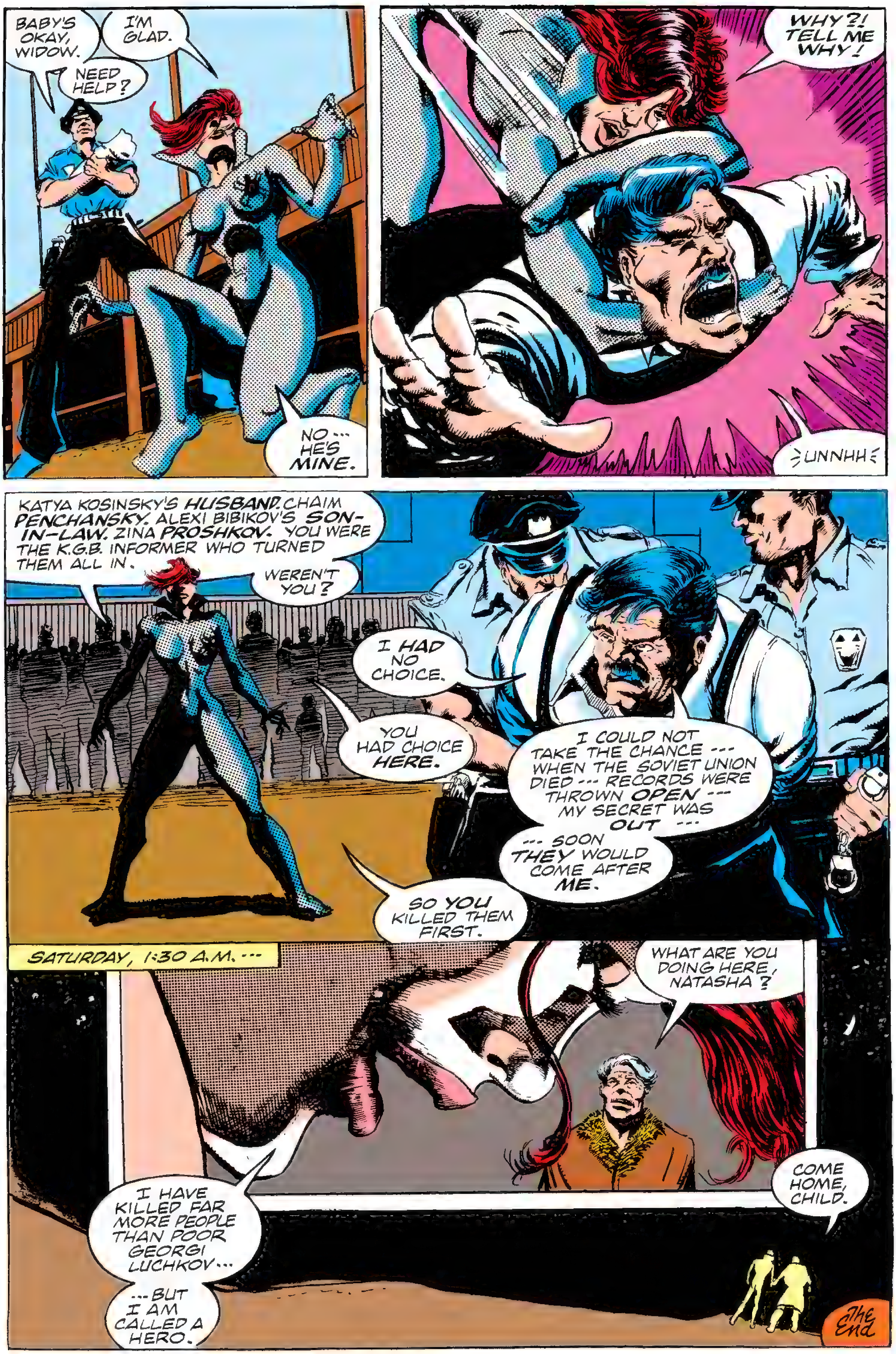

OOF
UNGH
DUMB, ROOKIE.
HELP ME, BARRY! SHE'S GONNA KILL ME, MAN!
NOT TODAY, "COMRADE".
HUH?
SORRY, WIDOW. KID THINKS HE'S T.J. HOOKER.
HE'LL LEARN. GIVE'M SIX MONTHS.
YOUR PARTNER IS NOT MY PROBLEM, SERGEANT.
COME --- I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT IS.
HER NAME WAS KATYA KOSINSKY.
LIKE THE OTHERS, EXPELLED FROM THE SOVIET UNION AS A DISRUPTIVE AND UNSOCIAL ELEMENT.
LOOKS LIKE SHE WAS STRANGLED. JUST LIKE THE OTHERS.
TUESDAY, 4:30 P.M. ---
I'M SORRY, TOTA MARIA. I KNOW YOU WERE FRIENDS WITH HER.
KATYA WAS A MISERABLE WOMAN WHO WOULDN'T GIVE CRUMBS TO A STARVING BIRD, BUT WE CRIED TOGETHER WHEN THEY TORE DOWN LENIN'S STATUE.
WELL, NOW SHE IS DEAD, AND MAYBE HAPPIER FOR IT.
DRINK YOUR TEA, NATALIA, BEFORE IT GETS COLD.


THE KILLINGS WILL STOP, TOTA. I PROMISE YOU, THEY--
I STILL DO NOT COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND THIS AMERICAN WAY OF SUPERSTAR HEROES, GREAT AVENGERS.
WHAT'S WRONG, TOTA? HAVE I DONE SOMETHING TO ANGER YOU?
A BULLET. A KNIFE. A PELLET OF FAST-ACTING POISON.
IS THAT WHAT YOU EXPECT OF ME? STILL?
FORGETTING---FORGIVING AND TRUSTING AGAIN--- THESE THINGS CAN BE VERY HARD, 'TASHA.
BUT THEN I ASK MYSELF, WHO LIVES WITHOUT GUILT? WHO HASN'T SOLD THEIR SOUL FOR A BIT OF HARD BREAD AND A ROLL OF TOILET PAPER?
TOILET PAPER?
EVERYBODY HAS THEIR PRICE, 'TASHA.
THEY FOUND MINE.
THEY FOUND EVERYBODY'S.
UNTIL THE WORLD FINDS THEIRS, THANK HEAVENS.
THEY AREN'T REALLY DEAD, 'TASHA.
NO--- JUST SLEEPING. LIKE THE BEAR IN WINTER.
AS A CHILD, ALL I EVER WANTED WAS TO DANCE.
AS AN OLD WOMAN, ALL I WANTED WAS SOME COMPANY FOR A FEW DAYS.
I'M SORRY, TOTA---
---BUT SOMEONE OUT THERE HAS ANOTHER AGENDA---
---AND I CAN'T IGNORE IT.


WEDNESDAY, 1:15 P.M.---
TO USE STRANGERS, THAT IS ONE THING. BUT TO USE PEOPLE YOU *KNOW* ---
---*THAT* IS KGB, NATASHA.
GOOD MORNING, MARIA KOMAROVSHKY. I HELP YOU, YES? TEA? COFFEE?
THE KGB USED INFORMATION TO *HURT* PEOPLE. I AM TRYING TO *HELP* THEM.
DO NOT WORRY, TOTA. I WILL BE DISCREET.
PERHAPS AMERICAN HOT DOG WITH ALL TRIMMINGS FOR NATASHA ALIANOVNA ROMANOVNA, BOLSHOI BALLERINA?
I AM FLATTERED YOU REME--
HEY, YOU'RE THE *BLACK WIDOW,* AREN'TCHA? THE *AVENGER* CHICK, RIGHT?
COOL.
AN AMERICAN HOT DOG WITH ALL THE TRIMMINGS SOUNDS *DELICIOUS.* AND TEA, PLEASE.
NO TEA, NO HOT DOG.
BUT YOU JUST--
NYET.
BOZHEMOI!
NOW WHAT?


FRIDAY, 7:30 P.M.---
GOOD SHABBOS, COMRADE ZHENYA PENKOVSKY.
YOU ARE WASTING YOUR TIME, WIDOW! I AM NOT YOUR KILLER!
DO I NEED TO INFORM THE CIA THAT YOUR DEFECTION WAS FALSE?
LIAR!
THE POT CALLS THE KETTLE BLACK. BUT THEY WILL BELIEVE ME, COMRADE.
I CAN PROMISE YOU THAT.
BE SMART, ZHENYA. TALK.


SATURDAY, 8:30 A.M.---
WILL YOU SERVE ME NOW, GEORGI LUCHKOV?
GO AWAY, KGB. THIS IS AMERICA. HERE I HAVE A CHOICE. HERE YOU CANNOT FORCE ME LIKE YOU DID TO ME AT HOME.
I AM NOT KGB ANY LONGER, GEORGI. I WENT TO HEL--
ONCE KGB, ALWAYS KGB!
I THINK I UNDERSTAND, GEORGI.
LET ME HELP YOU.
THEY THREATENED ME --- I AM NOT A BRAVE MAN ---
--- I GAVE IN ---
PUT THE KNIFE DOWN, GEORGI.
I AM SORRY, LADY ---
NO!
LEAVE ME ALONE!
MY LORD--!
WHUFF
THUDD


BABY'S OKAY, WIDOW.
I'M GLAD.
NEED HELP?
NO... HE'S MINE.
WHY?! TELL ME WHY!
≷UNNHH≷
KATYA KOSINSKY'S HUSBAND. CHAIM PENCHANSKY. ALEXI BIBIKOV'S SON-IN-LAW. ZINA PROSHKOV. YOU WERE THE K.G.B. INFORMER WHO TURNED THEM ALL IN.
WEREN'T YOU?
I HAD NO CHOICE.
YOU HAD CHOICE HERE.
I COULD NOT TAKE THE CHANCE --- WHEN THE SOVIET UNION DIED --- RECORDS WERE THROWN OPEN --- MY SECRET WAS OUT ---
--- SOON THEY WOULD COME AFTER ME.
SO YOU KILLED THEM FIRST.
SATURDAY, 1:30 A.M. ---
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, NATASHA?
COME HOME, CHILD.
I HAVE KILLED FAR MORE PEOPLE THAN POOR GEORGI LUCHKOV...
...BUT I AM CALLED A HERO.
The End

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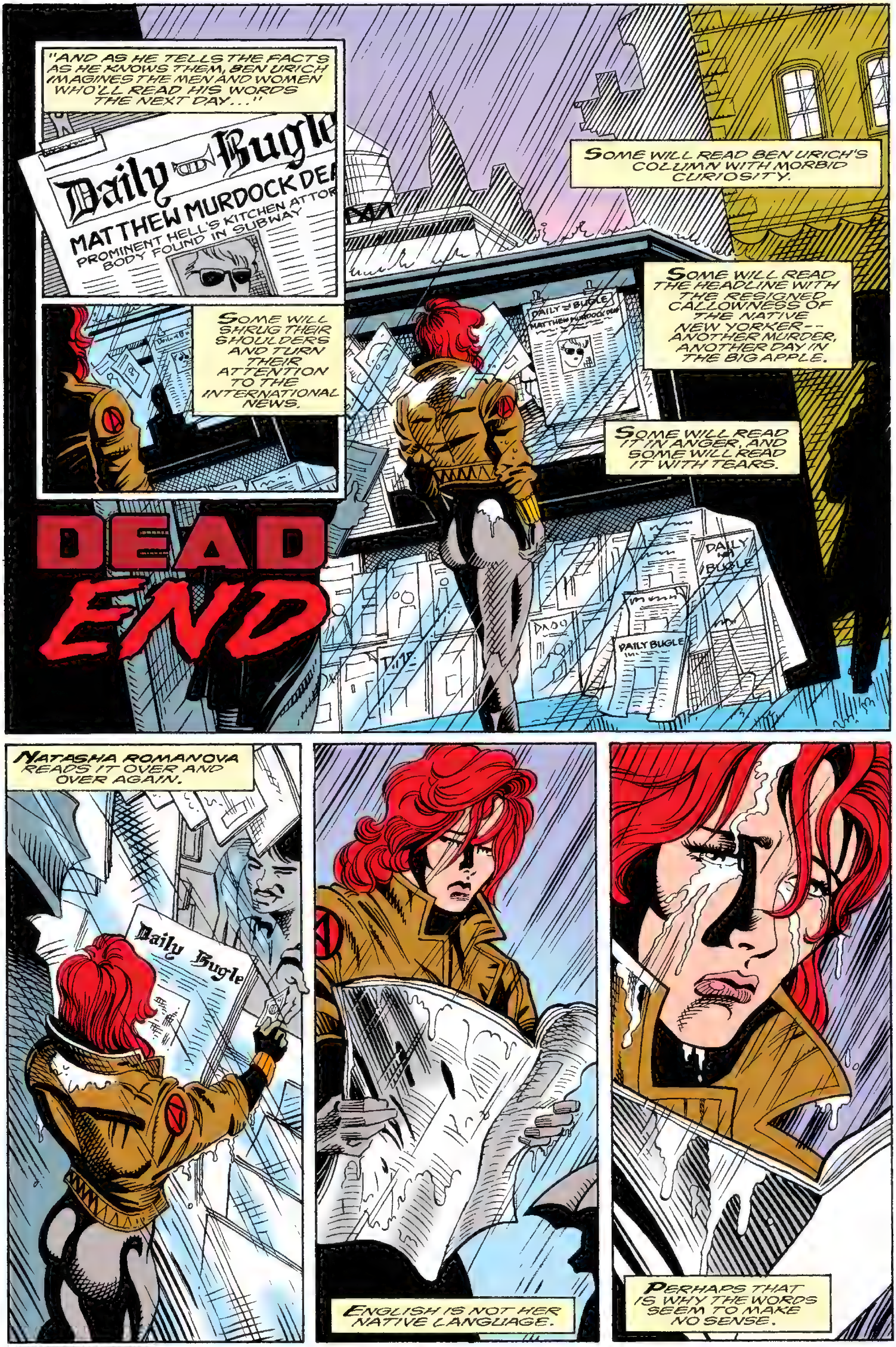
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN W OUT FEAR!
McDANIEL
GHOST OF EVIL'S PAST


"AND AS HE TELLS THE FACTS AS HE KNOWS THEM, BEN URICH IMAGINES THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO'LL READ HIS WORDS THE NEXT DAY..."
Daily Bugle
MATTHEW MURDOCK DEA
PROMINENT HELL'S KITCHEN ATTOR
BODY FOUND IN SUBWAY
SOME WILL SHRUG THEIR SHOULDERS AND TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS.
SOME WILL READ BEN URICH'S COLUMN WITH MORBID CURIOSITY.
SOME WILL READ THE HEADLINE WITH THE RESIGNED CALLOWNESS OF THE NATIVE NEW YORKER-- ANOTHER MURDER, ANOTHER DAY IN THE BIG APPLE.
SOME WILL READ IT IN ANGER, AND SOME WILL READ IT WITH TEARS.
DAILY BUGLE
DEAD END
NATASHA ROMANOVA READS IT OVER AND OVER AGAIN.
Daily Bugle
ENGLISH IS NOT HER NATIVE LANGUAGE.
PERHAPS THAT IS WHY THE WORDS SEEM TO MAKE NO SENSE.

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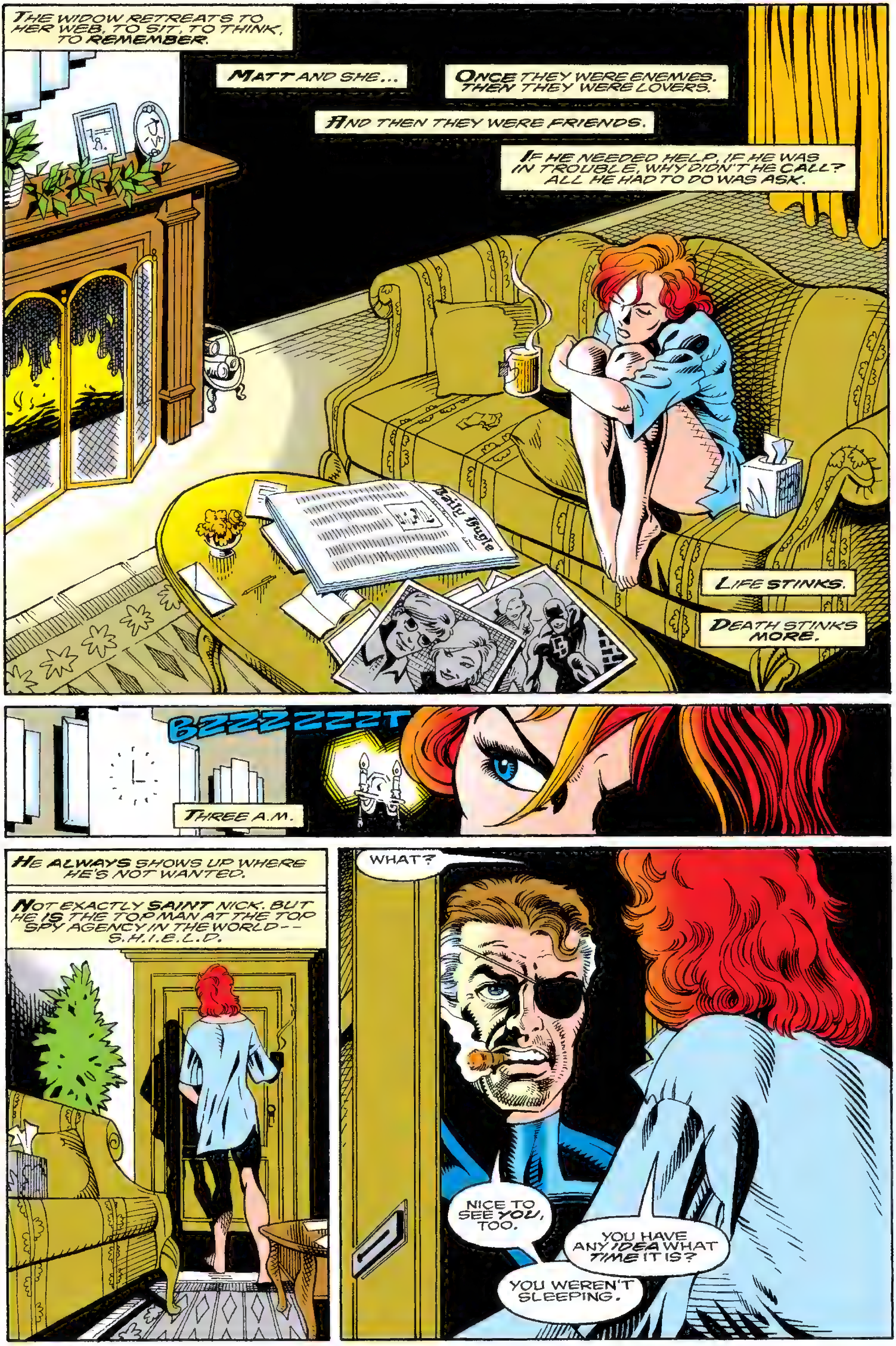
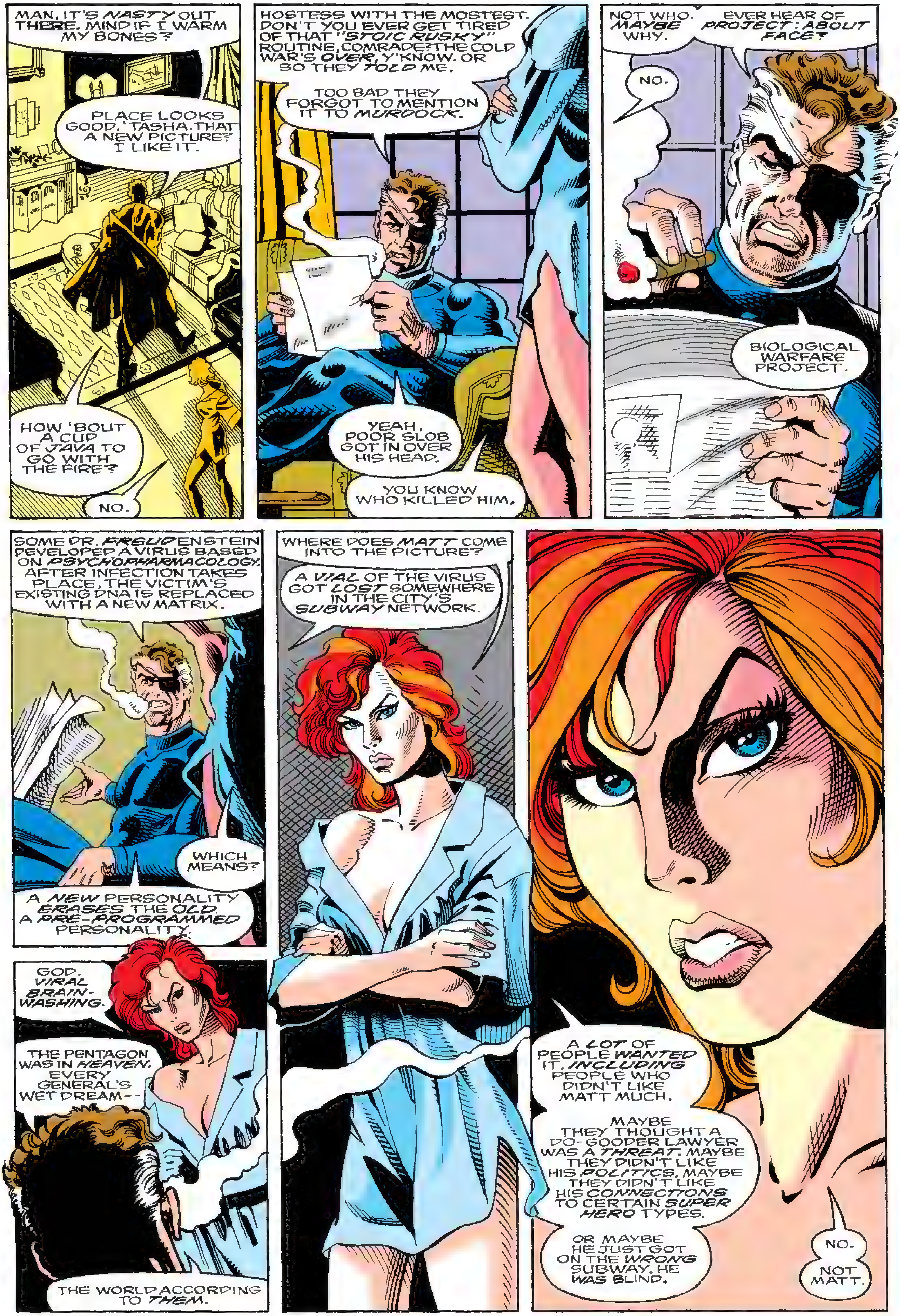
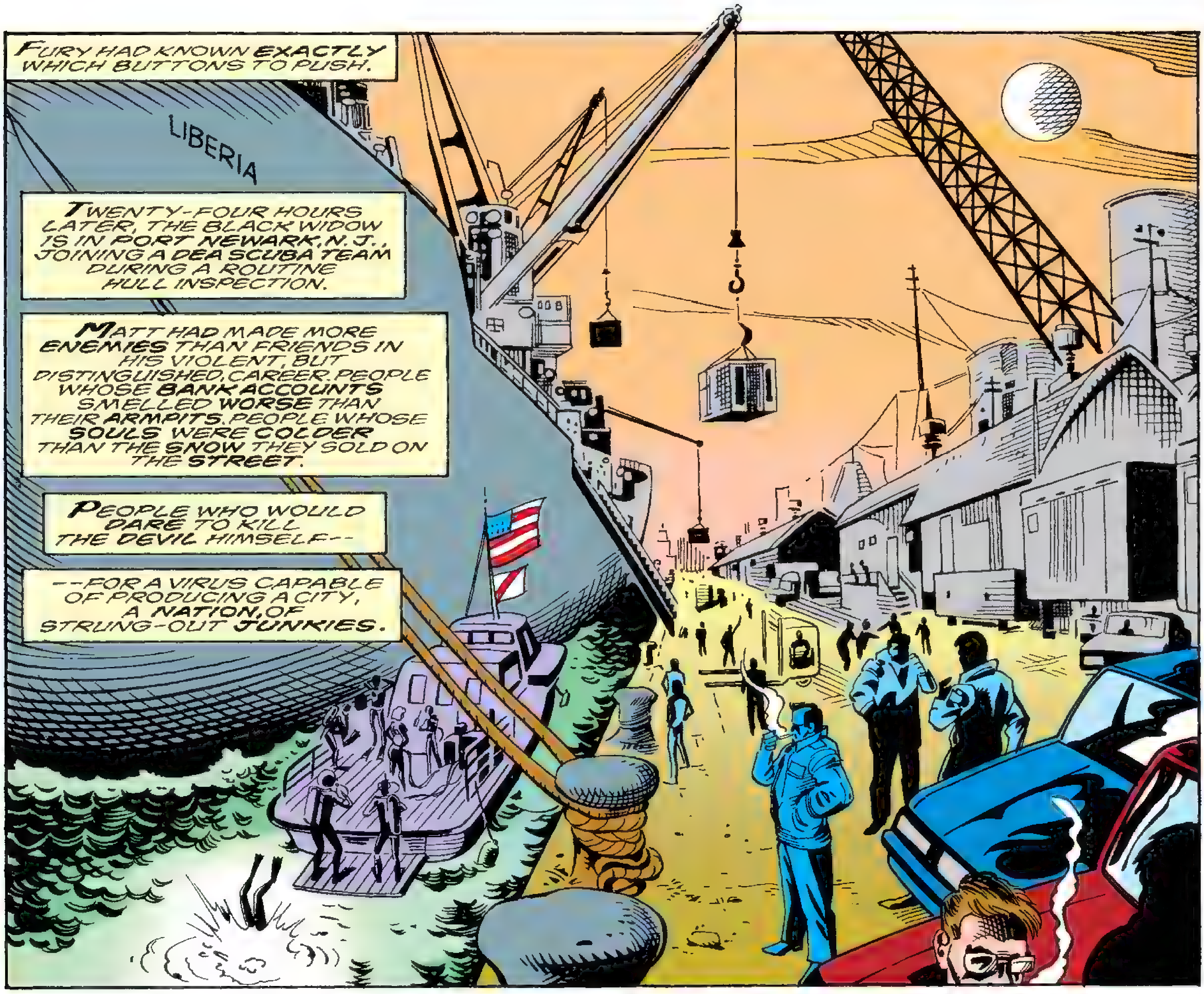
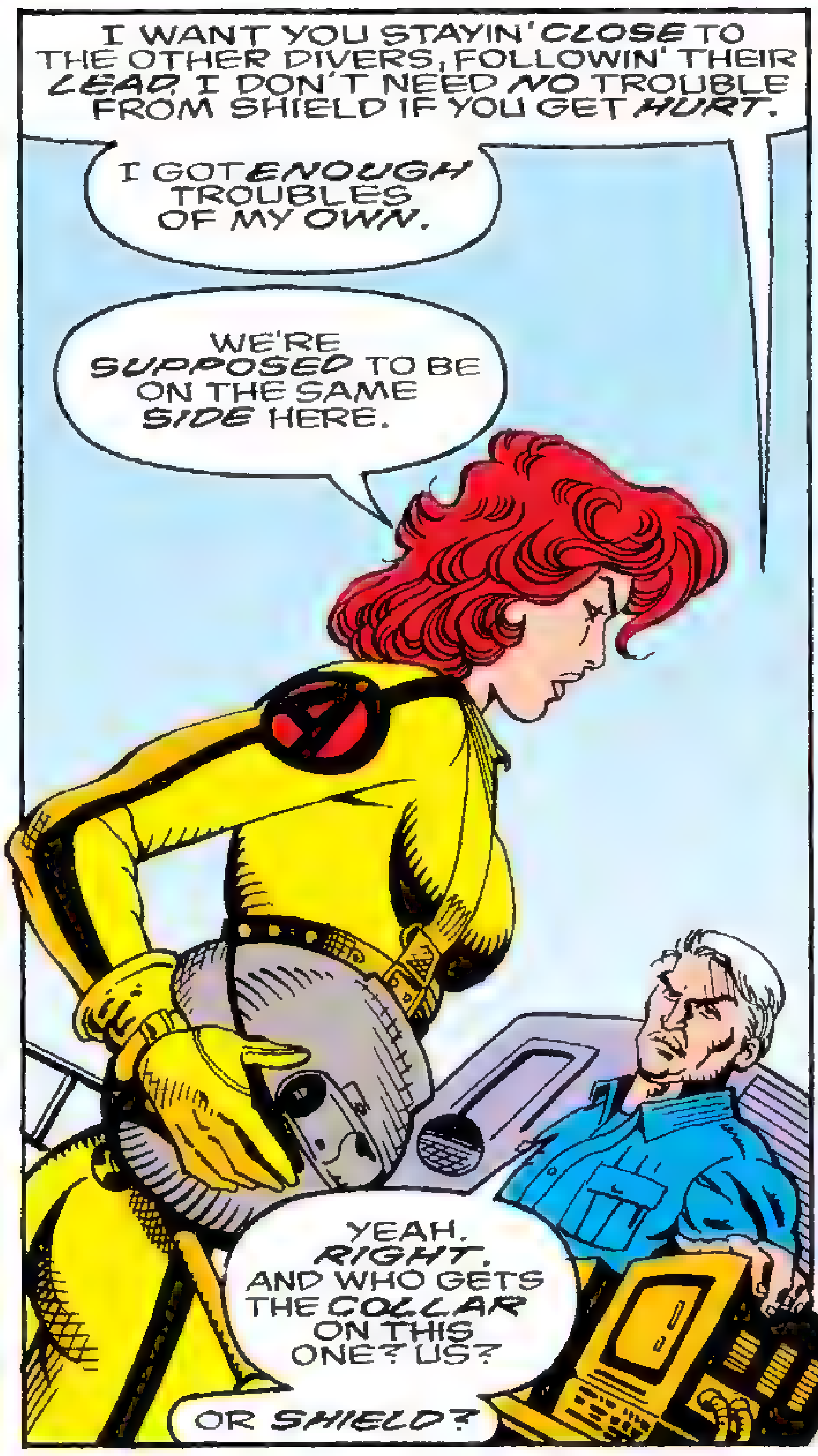
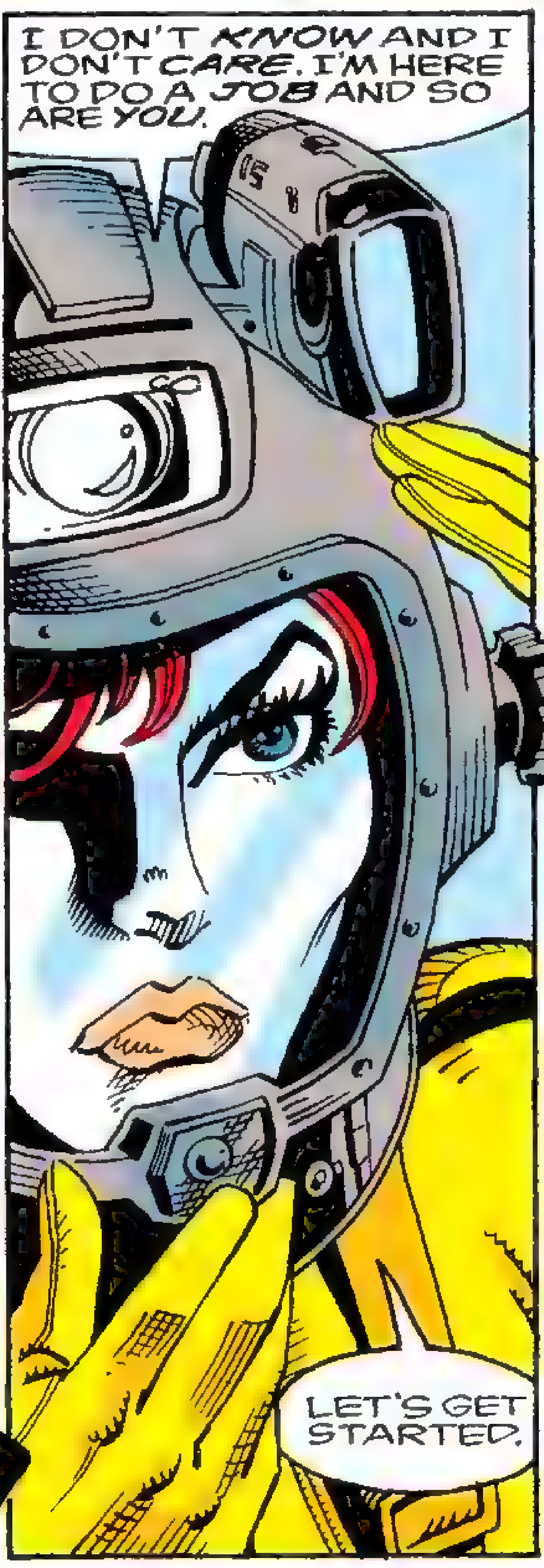
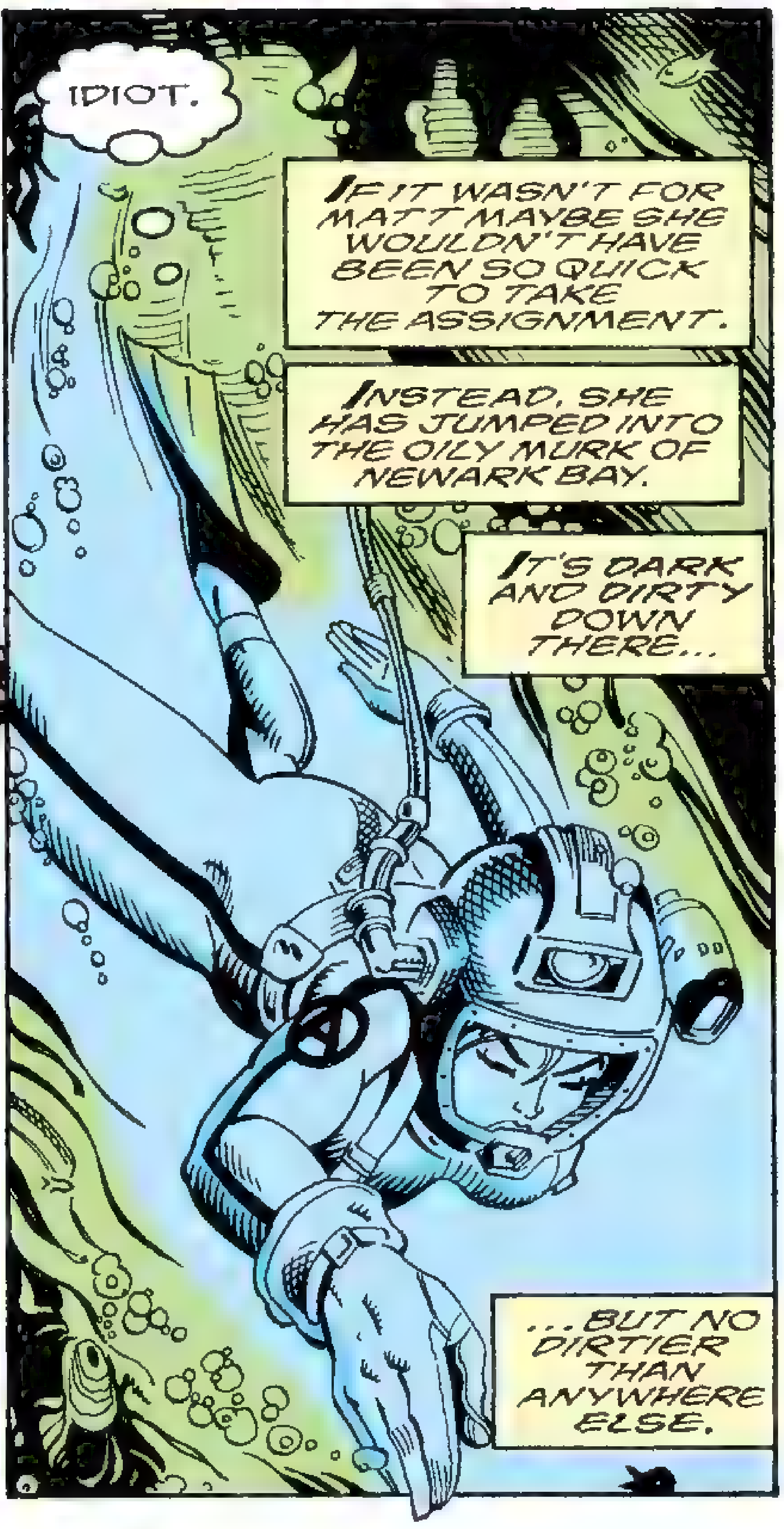

THE WIDOW RETREATS TO HER WEB, TO SIT, TO THINK, TO REMEMBER.
MATT AND SHE...
ONCE THEY WERE ENEMIES. THEN THEY WERE LOVERS.
AND THEN THEY WERE FRIENDS.
IF HE NEEDED HELP, IF HE WAS IN TROUBLE, WHY DIDN'T HE CALL? ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS ASK.
Daily Bugle
LIFE STINKS.
DEATH STINKS MORE.
BZZZZZZZT
THREE A.M.
HE ALWAYS SHOWS UP WHERE HE'S NOT WANTED.
NOT EXACTLY SAINT NICK. BUT HE IS THE TOP MAN AT THE TOP SPY AGENCY IN THE WORLD-- S.H.I.E.L.D.
WHAT?
NICE TO SEE YOU, TOO.
YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT TIME IT IS?
YOU WEREN'T SLEEPING.

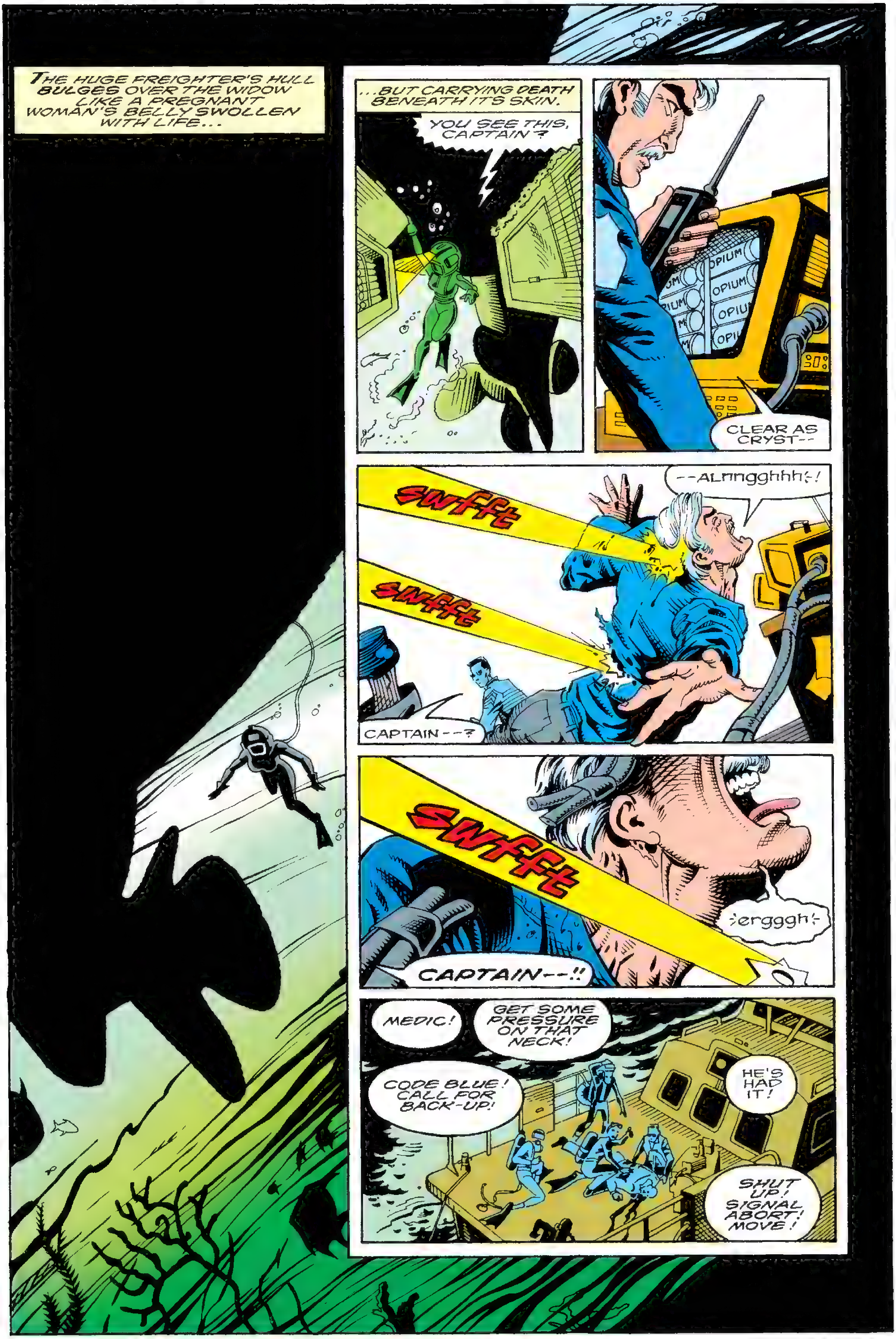

MAN, IT'S NASTY OUT THERE. MIND IF I WARM MY BONES?
PLACE LOOKS GOOD, 'TASHA. THAT A NEW PICTURE? I LIKE IT.
HOW 'BOUT A CUP OF JAVA TO GO WITH THE FIRE?
NO.
HOSTESS WITH THE MOSTEST. DON'T YOU EVER GET TIRED OF THAT "STOIC RUSKY" ROUTINE, COMRADE? THE COLD WAR'S OVER, Y'KNOW. OR SO THEY TOLD ME.
TOO BAD THEY FORGOT TO MENTION IT TO MURDOCK.
YEAH, POOR SLOB GOT IN OVER HIS HEAD.
YOU KNOW WHO KILLED HIM.
NOT WHO. MAYBE WHY.
NO.
EVER HEAR OF PROJECT: ABOUT FACE?
BIOLOGICAL WARFARE PROJECT.
SOME DR. FREUDENSTEIN DEVELOPED A VIRUS BASED ON PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY. AFTER INFECTION TAKES PLACE, THE VICTIM'S EXISTING DNA IS REPLACED WITH A NEW MATRIX.
WHICH MEANS?
A NEW PERSONALITY ERASES THE OLD. A PRE-PROGRAMMED PERSONALITY.
GOD. VIRAL BRAIN-WASHING.
THE PENTAGON WAS IN HEAVEN. EVERY GENERAL'S WET DREAM--
THE WORLD ACCORDING TO THEM.
WHERE DOES MATT COME INTO THE PICTURE?
A VIAL OF THE VIRUS GOT LOST SOMEWHERE IN THE CITY'S SUBWAY NETWORK.
A LOT OF PEOPLE WANTED IT, INCLUDING PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T LIKE MATT MUCH.
MAYBE THEY THOUGHT A DO-GOODER LAWYER WAS A THREAT. MAYBE THEY DIDN'T LIKE HIS POLITICS. MAYBE THEY DIDN'T LIKE HIS CONNECTIONS TO CERTAIN SUPER HERO TYPES.
OR MAYBE HE JUST GOT ON THE WRONG SUBWAY. HE WAS BLIND.
NO.
NOT MATT.


FURY HAD KNOWN EXACTLY WHICH BUTTONS TO PUSH.
LIBERIA
TWENTY-FOUR HOURS LATER, THE BLACK WIDOW IS IN PORT NEWARK, N.J., JOINING A DEA SCUBA TEAM DURING A ROUTINE HULL INSPECTION.
MATT HAD MADE MORE ENEMIES THAN FRIENDS IN HIS VIOLENT, BUT DISTINGUISHED, CAREER. PEOPLE WHOSE BANK ACCOUNTS SMELLED WORSE THAN THEIR ARMPITS. PEOPLE WHOSE SOULS WERE COLDER THAN THE SNOW THEY SOLD ON THE STREET.
PEOPLE WHO WOULD DARE TO KILL THE DEVIL HIMSELF--
--FOR A VIRUS CAPABLE OF PRODUCING A CITY, A NATION, OF STRUNG-OUT JUNKIES.


I WANT YOU STAYIN' CLOSE TO THE OTHER DIVERS, FOLLOWIN' THEIR LEAD. I DON'T NEED NO TROUBLE FROM SHIELD IF YOU GET HURT.
I GOT ENOUGH TROUBLES OF MY OWN.
WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE ON THE SAME SIDE HERE.
YEAH. RIGHT. AND WHO GETS THE COLLAR ON THIS ONE? US?
OR SHIELD?

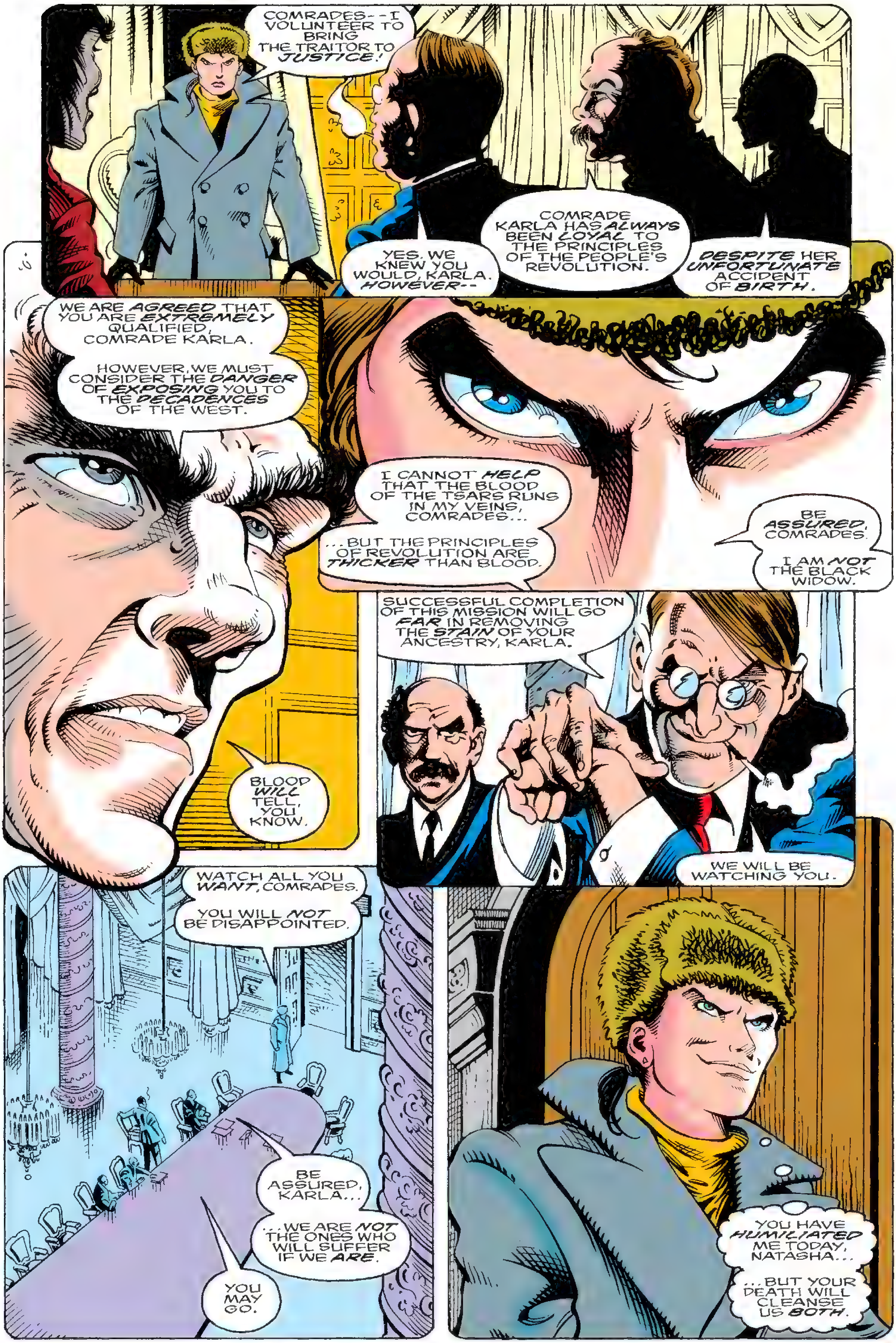

I DON'T KNOW AND I DON'T CARE. I'M HERE TO DO A JOB AND SO ARE YOU.
LET'S GET STARTED.

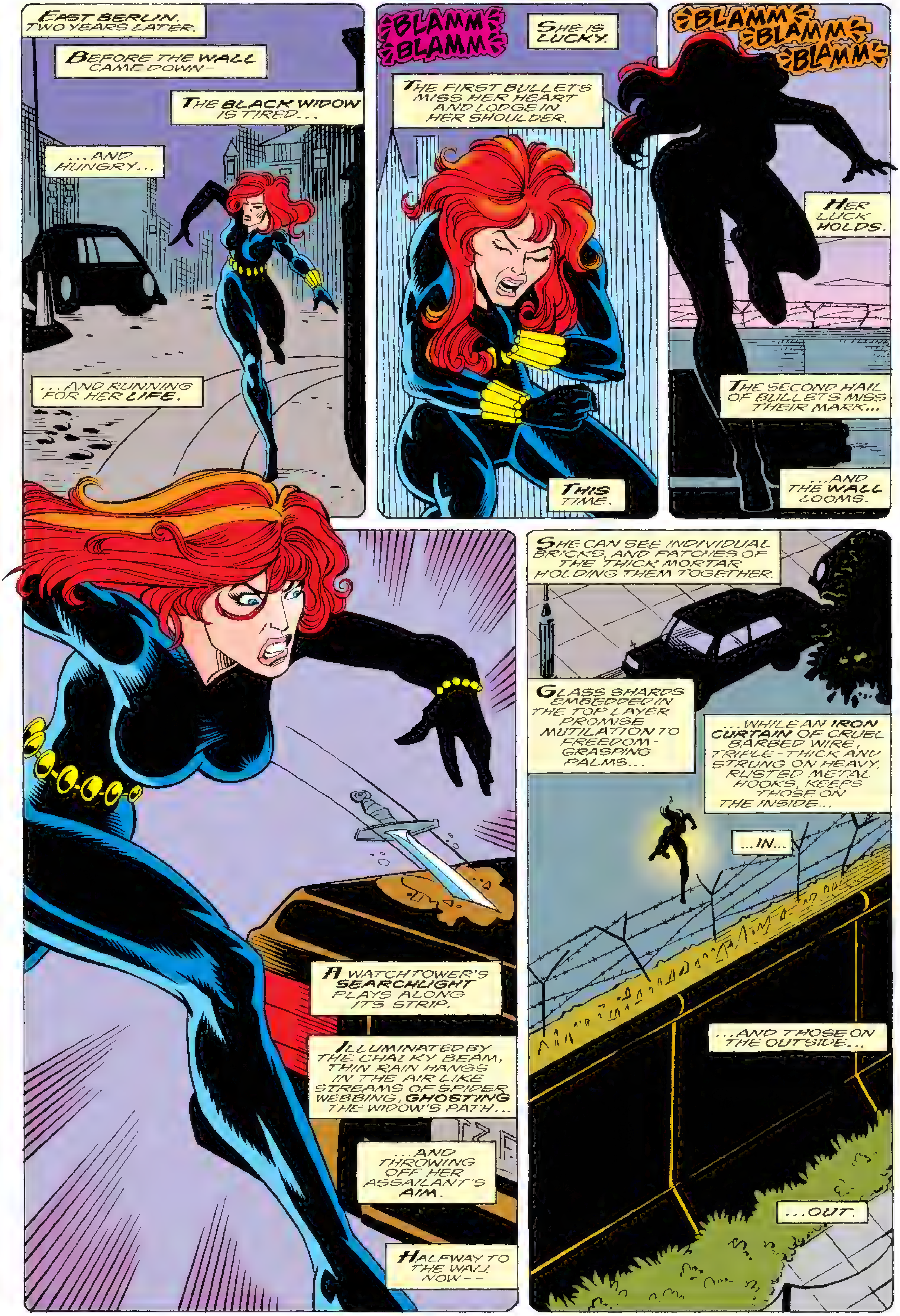

IDIOT.
IF IT WASN'T FOR MATT MAYBE SHE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO QUICK TO TAKE THE ASSIGNMENT.
INSTEAD, SHE HAS JUMPED INTO THE OILY MURK OF NEWARK BAY.
IT'S DARK AND DIRTY DOWN THERE...
...BUT NO DIRTIER THAN ANYWHERE ELSE.

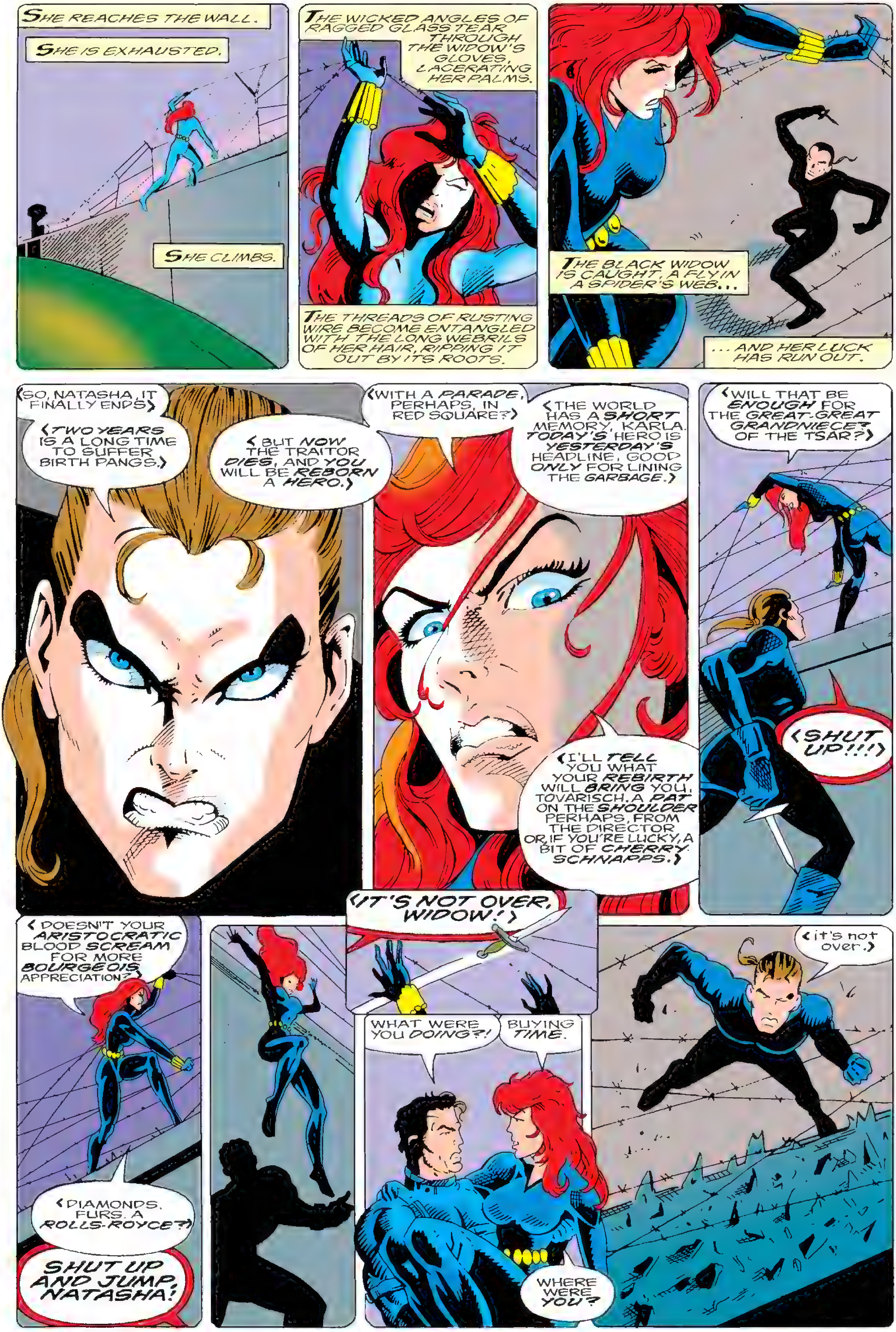

THE HUGE FREIGHTER'S HULL BULGES OVER THE WIDOW LIKE A PREGNANT WOMAN'S BELLY SWOLLEN WITH LIFE...
...BUT CARRYING DEATH BENEATH IT'S SKIN.
YOU SEE THIS, CAPTAIN?
OPIUM
CLEAR AS CRYST--
SWFFT
SWFFT
--ALnngghhh-!
CAPTAIN--?
SWFFT
-ergggh-
CAPTAIN--!!
MEDIC!
GET SOME PRESSURE ON THAT NECK!
CODE BLUE! CALL FOR BACK-UP!
HE'S HAD IT!
SHUT UP! SIGNAL ABORT! MOVE!

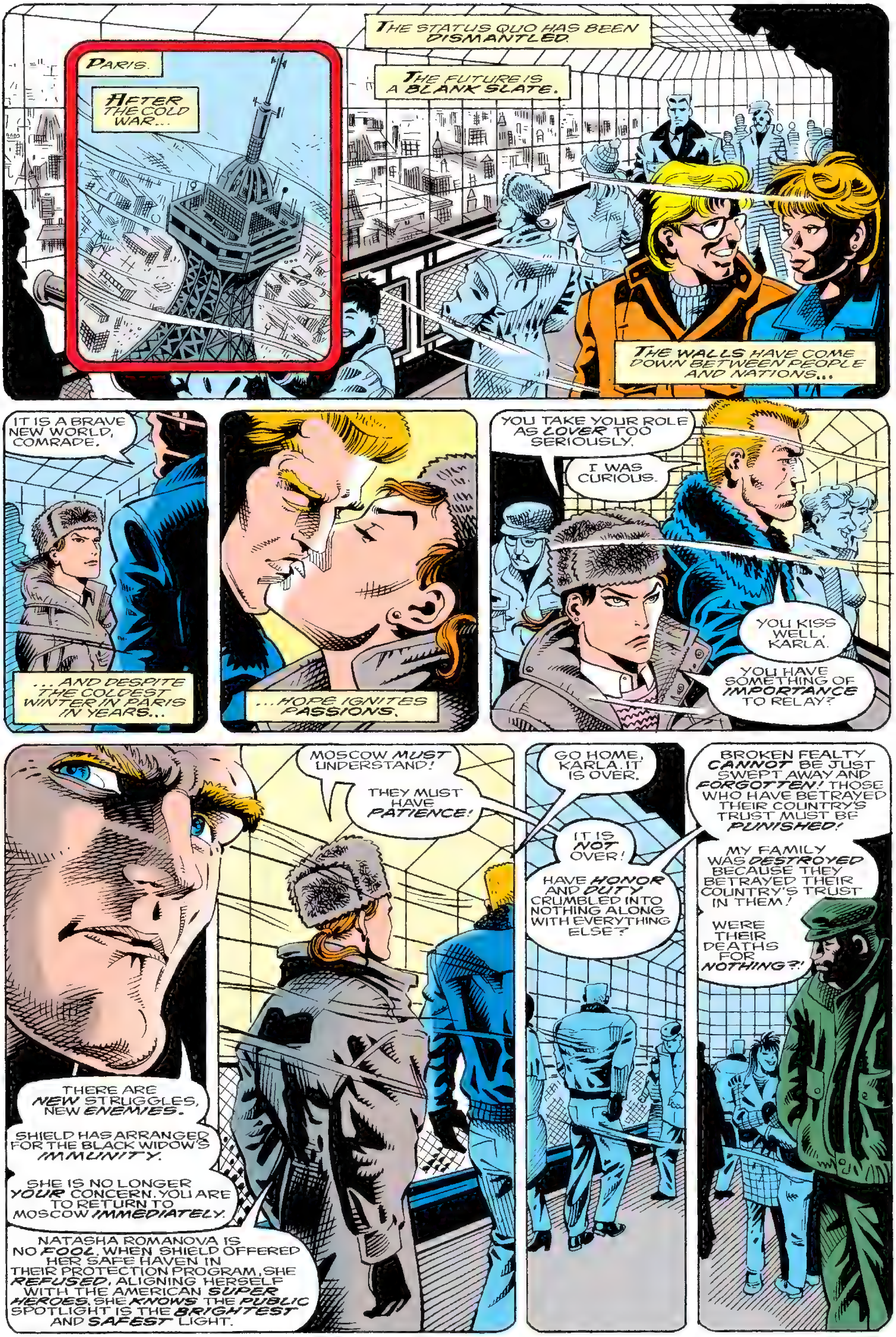
THE KILLER IS OSAKU, MASTER ASSASSIN-THIEF OF THE SNAKEROOT, THE HIDDEN HEART OF THE SECRET CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION KNOWN AS THE HAND.
BUT THE CAPTAIN WAS ONLY AN INCIDENTAL TARGET.
DROP IT! DOWN ON THE GROUND! NOW!
THERE'S NO ONE THERE, DOUG.
I COULDA SWORN--
THE WIDOW IS DROWNING.
HER AIR HOSE HAS BEEN SEVERED.
SHE STRUGGLES NOT TO PANIC. THE OTHER DIVERS'LL COME.
THE OTHER DIVERS. WHERE ARE THEY?
WHERE ARE THEY!!?
COUGH-COUGH-COUGH
EASY NOW. SLOW, DEEP BREATHS. THAT'S IT.
COUGH THANKS.
THIS--WHATEVER IT IS--IS WHAT KILLED HIM.
COUGH IT'S A SHURIKEN.
IT SEVERED YOUR AIR HOSE BEFORE IT SLIT THE CAPTAIN'S NECK.
OR DID THE CAPTAIN GET IN THE WAY?
MADE ANY ENEMIES LATELY, WIDOW?
BLASTED SHIELD AGENTS. WHO ASKED YOU TO BUTT IN?
YOUR CAPTAIN'S DEAD. DEAL WITH IT.
HE WOULDN'T BE DEAD IF YOU WEREN'T HERE.
ANOTHER INCREDIBLE LEAP IN LOGIC BY THE DEA.
IT'S NOT INCREDIBLE AT ALL.
TAKE A LOOK AT THIS.
WHAT IS THAT? POLISH?
RUSSIAN.
WHAT'S IT SAY?

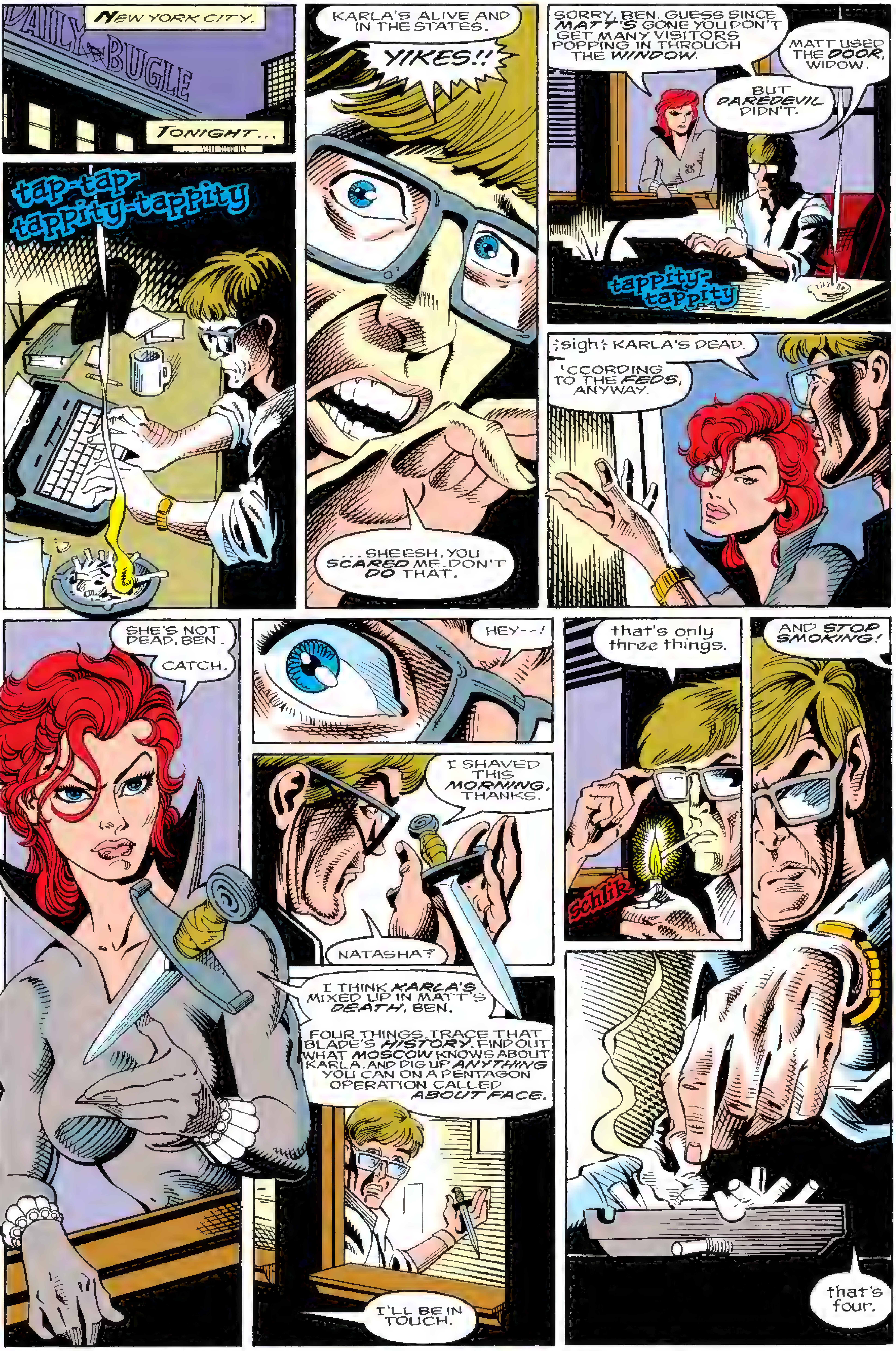
"THE KREMLIN'S MEMORY IS LONGER THAN SIBERIA'S WINTER".
MOSCOW.
BEFORE THE COLD WAR WAS OVER...
OUTSIDE THE GREAT WALL OF WHAT WAS ONCE THE PALACE OF THE TSARS, SILENT COMRADES DILIGENTLY SHOVEL SNOW, CLEARING **RED SQUARE** FOR THEIR LEADERS AND SOLDIERS.
IT IS **CHEAPER** AND **EASIER** THAN INVESTING IN MACHINERY.
MACHINERY IS **HARD** TO REPLACE.
BUT THERE IS **ALWAYS** ANOTHER COMRADE...
...WHO WILL WORK IN EXCHANGE FOR A LITTLE EXTRA **FOOD** OR A LITTLE EXTRA **VODKA**.
THE SHOVELING **WARMS** THEIR BLOOD. THE FOOD **FILLS** THEIR BELLY. THE VODKA **DULLS** THEIR SENSES...
...AND WARM, DRUNK COMRADES DO NOT **COMPLAIN** OR MAKE TROUBLE.
YOU ARE COMFORTABLE? WOULD YOU LIKE SOME BORSCHT, OR PERHAPS SOME VODKA?
THANK YOU, COMRADE DIRECTOR. BUT I DO NOT EAT WHEN I AM ON DUTY, AND I NEVER DRINK.
ENOUGH PLEASANTRIES.
NATASHA ROMANOVA HAS DEFECTED TO THE WEST.
THIS IS *UNACCEPTABLE.*

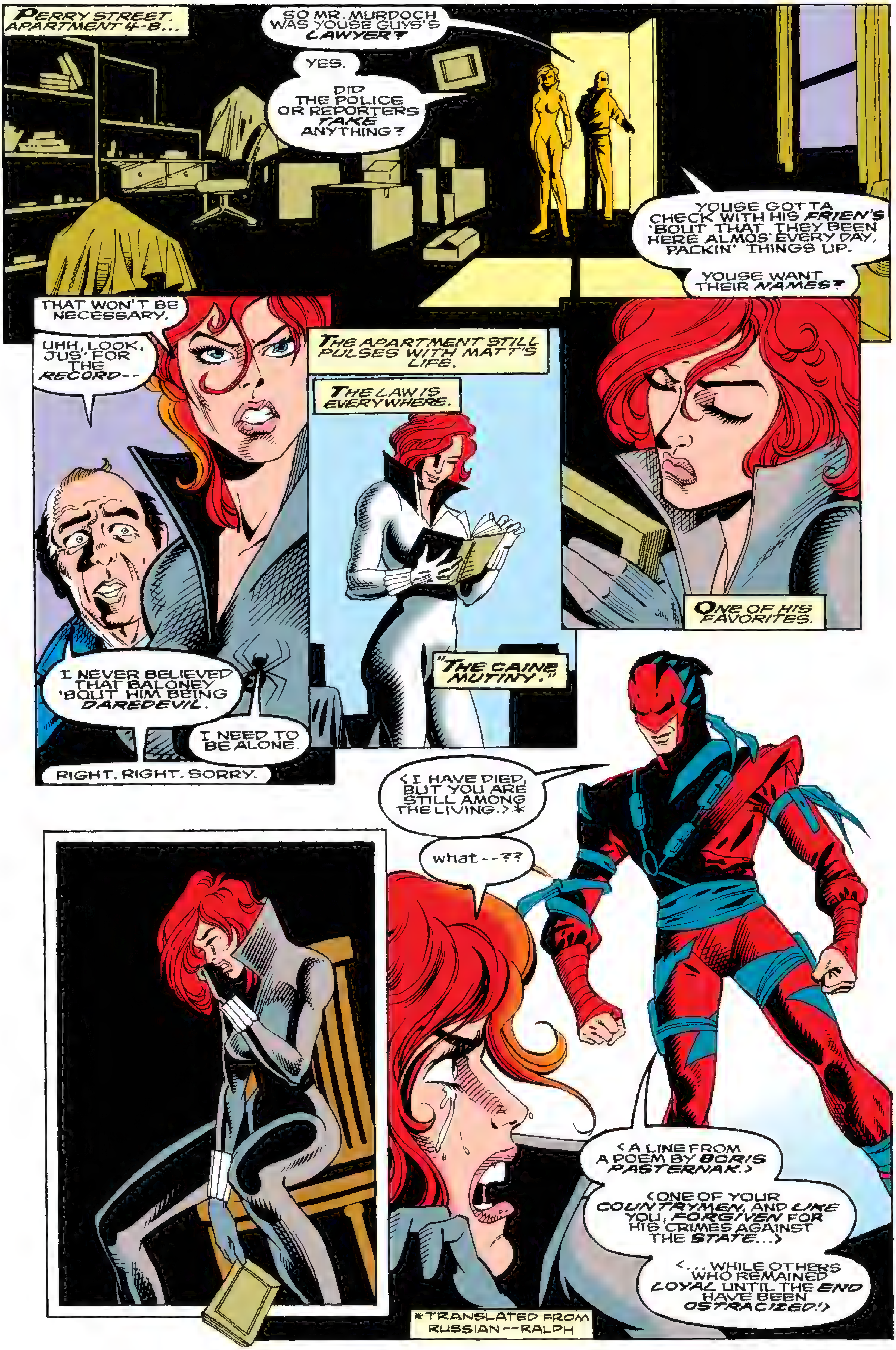

COMRADES--I VOLUNTEER TO BRING THE TRAITOR TO *JUSTICE!*
YES, WE KNEW YOU WOULD, KARLA. *HOWEVER--*
COMRADE KARLA HAS *ALWAYS* BEEN *LOYAL* TO THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION.
DESPITE HER *UNFORTUNATE* ACCIDENT OF *BIRTH*.
WE ARE *AGREED* THAT YOU ARE *EXTREMELY* QUALIFIED, COMRADE KARLA.
HOWEVER, WE MUST CONSIDER THE *DANGER* OF *EXPOSING* YOU TO THE *DECADENCES* OF THE WEST.
BLOOD *WILL* TELL, YOU KNOW.
I CANNOT *HELP* THAT THE BLOOD OF THE TSARS RUNS IN MY VEINS, COMRADES...
...BUT THE PRINCIPLES OF REVOLUTION ARE *THICKER* THAN BLOOD.
BE *ASSURED*, COMRADES.
I AM *NOT* THE BLACK WIDOW.
SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THIS MISSION WILL GO *FAR* IN REMOVING THE *STAIN* OF YOUR ANCESTRY, KARLA.
WE WILL BE WATCHING YOU.
WATCH ALL YOU *WANT*, COMRADES.
YOU WILL *NOT* BE DISAPPOINTED.
BE ASSURED, KARLA...
...WE ARE *NOT* THE ONES WHO WILL SUFFER IF WE *ARE*.
YOU MAY GO.
YOU HAVE *HUMILIATED* ME TODAY, NATASHA...
...BUT YOUR DEATH WILL CLEANSE US *BOTH*.


EAST BERLIN. TWO YEARS LATER.
BEFORE THE WALL CAME DOWN–
THE BLACK WIDOW IS TIRED...
...AND HUNGRY...
...AND RUNNING FOR HER LIFE.
BLAMM BLAMM
SHE IS LUCKY.
THE FIRST BULLETS MISS HER HEART AND LODGE IN HER SHOULDER.
THIS TIME.
BLAMM BLAMM BLAMM
HER LUCK HOLDS.
THE SECOND HAIL OF BULLETS MISS THEIR MARK...
...AND THE WALL LOOMS.
A WATCHTOWER'S SEARCHLIGHT PLAYS ALONG ITS STRIP.
ILLUMINATED BY THE CHALKY BEAM, THIN RAIN HANGS IN THE AIR LIKE STREAMS OF SPIDER WEBBING, GHOSTING THE WIDOW'S PATH...
...AND THROWING OFF HER ASSAILANT'S AIM.
HALFWAY TO THE WALL NOW--
SHE CAN SEE INDIVIDUAL BRICKS, AND PATCHES OF THE THICK MORTAR HOLDING THEM TOGETHER.
GLASS SHARDS EMBEDDED IN THE TOP LAYER PROMISE MUTILATION TO FREEDOM-GRASPING PALMS...
...WHILE AN IRON CURTAIN OF CRUEL BARBED WIRE, TRIPLE-THICK AND STRUNG ON HEAVY, RUSTED METAL HOOKS, KEEPS THOSE ON THE INSIDE...
...IN...
...AND THOSE ON THE OUTSIDE...
...OUT.

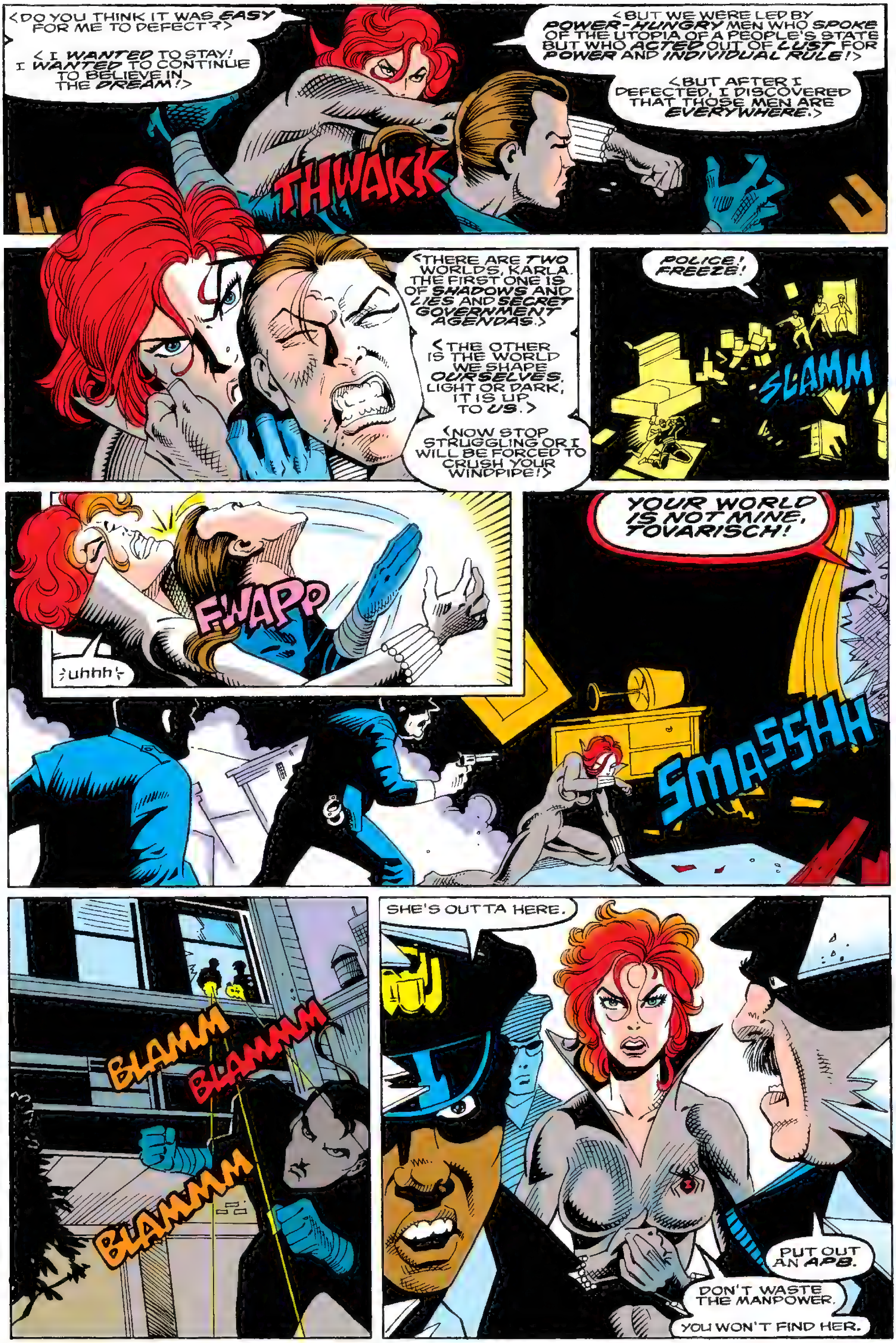

SHE REACHES THE WALL.
SHE IS EXHAUSTED.
SHE CLIMBS.
THE WICKED ANGLES OF RAGGED GLASS TEAR THROUGH THE WIDOW'S GLOVES, LACERATING HER PALMS.
THE THREADS OF RUSTING WIRE BECOME ENTANGLED WITH THE LONG WEBRILS OF HER HAIR, RIPPING IT OUT BY ITS ROOTS.
THE BLACK WIDOW IS CAUGHT, A FLY IN A SPIDER'S WEB...
...AND HER LUCK HAS RUN OUT.
‹SO, NATASHA, IT FINALLY ENDS›
‹TWO YEARS IS A LONG TIME TO SUFFER BIRTH PANGS.›
‹BUT NOW THE TRAITOR DIES, AND YOU WILL BE REBORN A HERO.›
‹WITH A PARADE, PERHAPS, IN RED SQUARE?›
‹THE WORLD HAS A SHORT MEMORY, KARLA. TODAY'S HERO IS YESTERDAY'S HEADLINE, GOOD ONLY FOR LINING THE GARBAGE.›
‹I'LL TELL YOU WHAT YOUR REBIRTH WILL BRING YOU, TOVARISCH. A PAT ON THE SHOULDER PERHAPS, FROM THE DIRECTOR OR, IF YOU'RE LUCKY, A BIT OF CHERRY SCHNAPPS.›
‹WILL THAT BE ENOUGH FOR THE GREAT-GREAT GRANDNIECE OF THE TSAR?›
‹SHUT UP!!!›
‹DOESN'T YOUR ARISTOCRATIC BLOOD SCREAM FOR MORE BOURGEOIS APPRECIATION?›
‹DIAMONDS. FURS. A ROLLS-ROYCE?›
SHUT UP AND JUMP, NATASHA!
‹IT'S NOT OVER, WIDOW!›
WHAT WERE YOU DOING?!
BUYING TIME.
WHERE WERE YOU?
‹it's not over.›

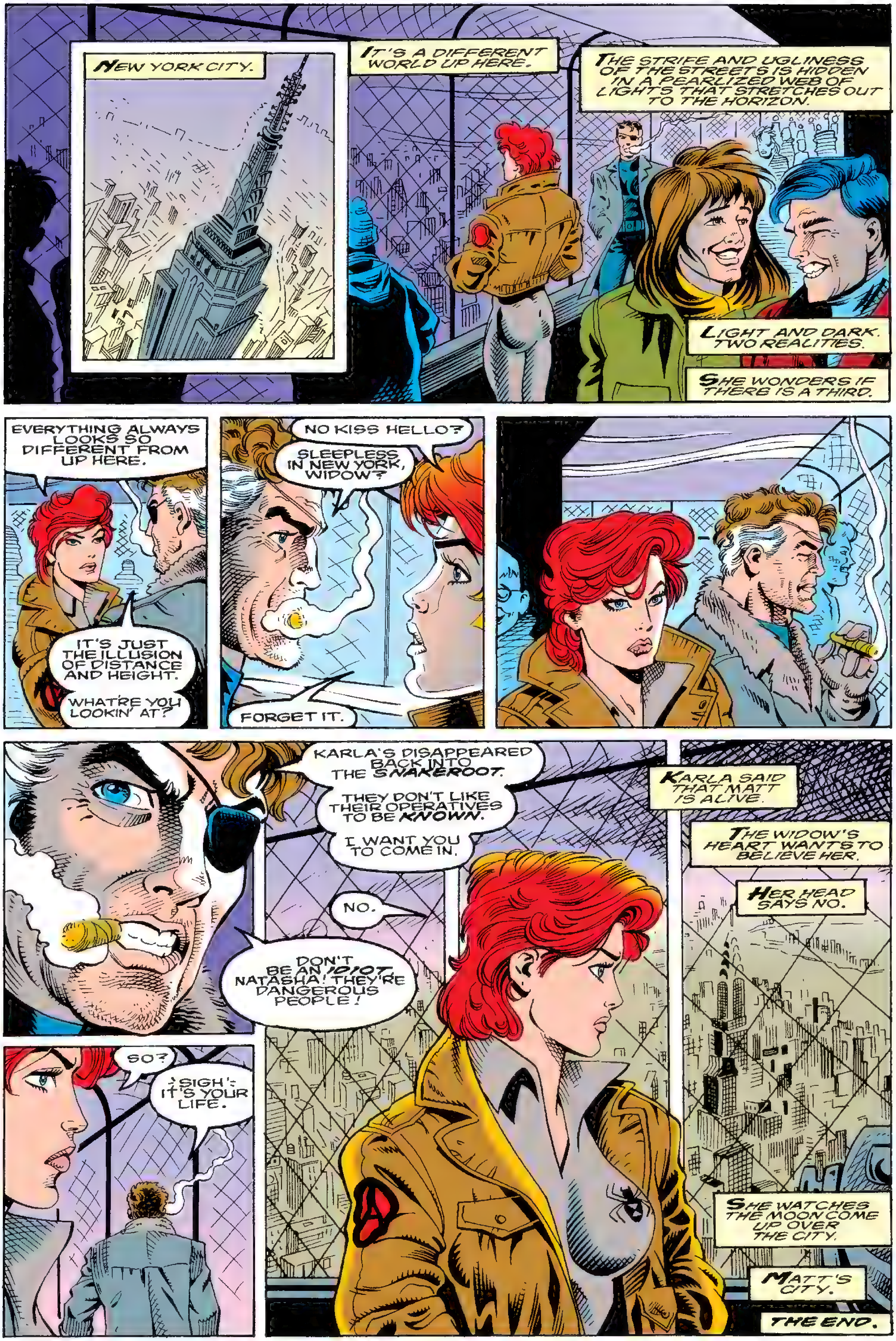

PARIS.
AFTER THE COLD WAR...
THE STATUS QUO HAS BEEN DISMANTLED.
THE FUTURE IS A BLANK SLATE.
THE WALLS HAVE COME DOWN BETWEEN PEOPLE AND NATIONS...
IT IS A BRAVE NEW WORLD, COMRADE.
...AND DESPITE THE COLDEST WINTER IN PARIS IN YEARS...
...HOPE IGNITES PASSIONS.
YOU TAKE YOUR ROLE AS LOVER TOO SERIOUSLY.
I WAS CURIOUS.
YOU KISS WELL, KARLA.
YOU HAVE SOMETHING OF IMPORTANCE TO RELAY?
THERE ARE NEW STRUGGLES, NEW ENEMIES.
SHIELD HAS ARRANGED FOR THE BLACK WIDOW'S IMMUNITY.
SHE IS NO LONGER YOUR CONCERN. YOU ARE TO RETURN TO MOSCOW IMMEDIATELY.
NATASHA ROMANOVA IS NO FOOL. WHEN SHIELD OFFERED HER SAFE HAVEN IN THEIR PROTECTION PROGRAM, SHE REFUSED, ALIGNING HERSELF WITH THE AMERICAN SUPER HEROES. SHE KNOWS THE PUBLIC SPOTLIGHT IS THE BRIGHTEST AND SAFEST LIGHT.
MOSCOW MUST UNDERSTAND!
THEY MUST HAVE PATIENCE!
GO HOME, KARLA. IT IS OVER.
IT IS NOT OVER!
HAVE HONOR AND DUTY CRUMBLED INTO NOTHING ALONG WITH EVERYTHING ELSE?
BROKEN FEALTY CANNOT BE JUST SWEPT AWAY AND FORGOTTEN! THOSE WHO HAVE BETRAYED THEIR COUNTRY'S TRUST MUST BE PUNISHED!
MY FAMILY WAS DESTROYED BECAUSE THEY BETRAYED THEIR COUNTRY'S TRUST IN THEM!
WERE THEIR DEATHS FOR NOTHING?!


NEW YORK CITY.
DAILY BUGLE
TONIGHT...
tap-tap-tappity-tappity
KARLA'S ALIVE AND IN THE STATES.
YIKES!!
...SHEESH, YOU SCARED ME. DON'T DO THAT.
SORRY, BEN. GUESS SINCE MATT'S GONE YOU DON'T GET MANY VISITORS POPPING IN THROUGH THE WINDOW.
MATT USED THE DOOR, WIDOW.
BUT DAREDEVIL DIDN'T.
tappity-tappity
¡sigh¡ KARLA'S DEAD.
'CCORDING TO THE FEDS, ANYWAY.
SHE'S NOT DEAD, BEN.
CATCH.
HEY--!
I SHAVED THIS MORNING, THANKS.
NATASHA?
I THINK KARLA'S MIXED UP IN MATT'S DEATH, BEN.
FOUR THINGS. TRACE THAT BLADE'S HISTORY. FIND OUT WHAT MOSCOW KNOWS ABOUT KARLA. AND DIG UP ANYTHING YOU CAN ON A PENTAGON OPERATION CALLED ABOUT FACE.
I'LL BE IN TOUCH.
that's only three things.
schlik
AND STOP SMOKING!
that's four.


PERRY STREET. APARTMENT 4-B...
SO MR. MURDOCH WAS YOUSE GUYS'S *LAWYER?*
YES.
DID THE POLICE OR REPORTERS *TAKE* ANYTHING?
YOUSE GOTTA CHECK WITH HIS *FRIEN'S* 'BOUT THAT. THEY BEEN HERE ALMOS' EVERY DAY, PACKIN' THINGS UP.
YOUSE WANT THEIR *NAMES?*
THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY.
UHH, LOOK. JUS' FOR THE *RECORD--*
I NEVER BELIEVED THAT BALONEY 'BOUT HIM BEING *DAREDEVIL*.
I NEED TO BE ALONE.
RIGHT. RIGHT. SORRY.
THE APARTMENT STILL PULSES WITH MATT'S LIFE.
THE LAW IS EVERYWHERE.
"THE CAINE MUTINY."
ONE OF HIS FAVORITES.
<I HAVE DIED, BUT YOU ARE STILL AMONG THE LIVING.>*
what--??
<A LINE FROM A POEM BY *BORIS PASTERNAK*.>
<ONE OF YOUR *COUNTRYMEN*, AND *LIKE* YOU, *FORGIVEN* FOR HIS CRIMES AGAINST THE *STATE*...>
<...WHILE OTHERS WHO REMAINED *LOYAL* UNTIL THE *END* HAVE BEEN *OSTRACIZED!*>
*TRANSLATED FROM RUSSIAN --RALPH

KRAKKK
uhhhh
<MANY HAVE PAID FOR CRIMES OF WHICH THEY WERE *INNOCENT,* NATASHA.>
BRAKKSH
<*NOW* IT IS TIME FOR THE *GUILTY* TO BE *PUNISHED!*>
SHAP
grumph
THWAKK
<*NO* ONE ESCAPES *PAYMENT,* KARLA, NOT *ME*...>
F-WAT
<...NOT *YOU!*>
NYET!
OOF
BRAKKK
THUD
<I *WILL* KILL YOU!>
SKAKK
THRASSH
<ENOUGH!!!>


<DO YOU THINK IT WAS EASY FOR ME TO DEFECT?>
<I WANTED TO STAY! I WANTED TO CONTINUE TO BELIEVE IN THE DREAM!>
<BUT WE WERE LED BY POWER-HUNGRY MEN WHO SPOKE OF THE UTOPIA OF A PEOPLE'S STATE BUT WHO ACTED OUT OF LUST FOR POWER AND INDIVIDUAL RULE!>
<BUT AFTER I DEFECTED, I DISCOVERED THAT THOSE MEN ARE EVERYWHERE.>
THWAKK
<THERE ARE TWO WORLDS, KARLA. THE FIRST ONE IS OF SHADOWS AND LIES AND SECRET GOVERNMENT AGENDAS.>
<THE OTHER IS THE WORLD WE SHAPE OURSELVES. LIGHT OR DARK, IT IS UP TO US.>
<NOW STOP STRUGGLING OR I WILL BE FORCED TO CRUSH YOUR WINDPIPE!>
POLICE! FREEZE!
SLAMM
FWAPP
;uhhh;
YOUR WORLD IS NOT MINE, TOVARISCH!
SMASSHH
BLAMM
BLAMMM
BLAMMM
SHE'S OUTTA HERE.
PUT OUT AN APB.
DON'T WASTE THE MANPOWER.
YOU WON'T FIND HER.


NEW YORK CITY.
IT'S A DIFFERENT WORLD UP HERE.
THE STRIFE AND UGLINESS OF THE STREETS IS HIDDEN IN A PEARLIZED WEB OF LIGHTS THAT STRETCHES OUT TO THE HORIZON.
LIGHT AND DARK. TWO REALITIES.
SHE WONDERS IF THERE IS A THIRD.
EVERYTHING ALWAYS LOOKS SO DIFFERENT FROM UP HERE.
IT'S JUST THE ILLUSION OF DISTANCE AND HEIGHT.
WHAT'RE YOU LOOKIN' AT?
NO KISS HELLO?
SLEEPLESS IN NEW YORK, WIDOW?
FORGET IT.
KARLA'S DISAPPEARED BACK INTO THE SNAKEROOT.
THEY DON'T LIKE THEIR OPERATIVES TO BE KNOWN.
I WANT YOU TO COME IN.
NO.
DON'T BE AN IDIOT, NATASHA! THEY'RE DANGEROUS PEOPLE!
SO?
SIGH. IT'S YOUR LIFE.
KARLA SAID THAT MATT IS ALIVE.
THE WIDOW'S HEART WANTS TO BELIEVE HER.
HER HEAD SAYS NO.
SHE WATCHES THE MOON COME UP OVER THE CITY.
MATT'S CITY.
THE END.

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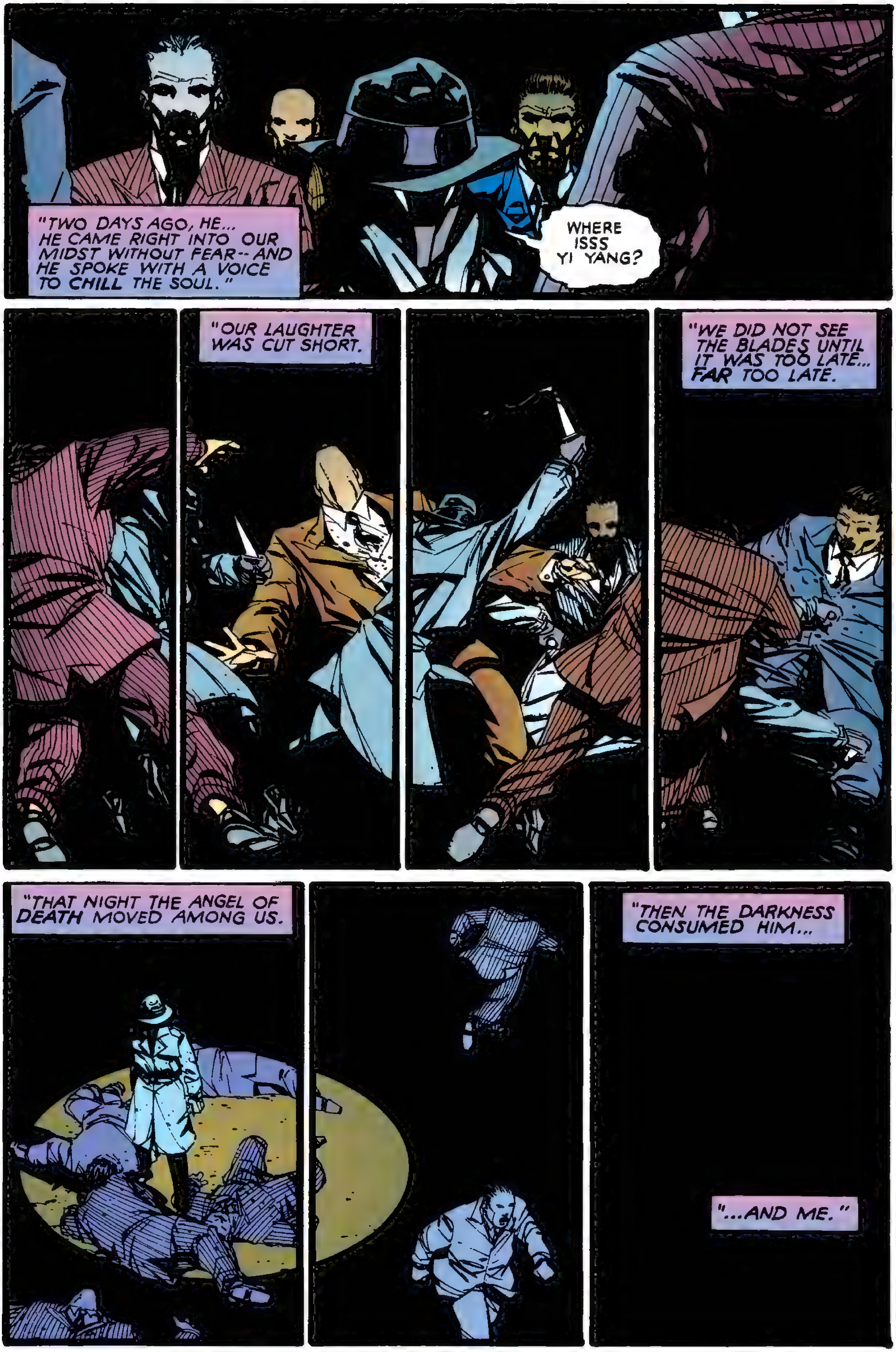
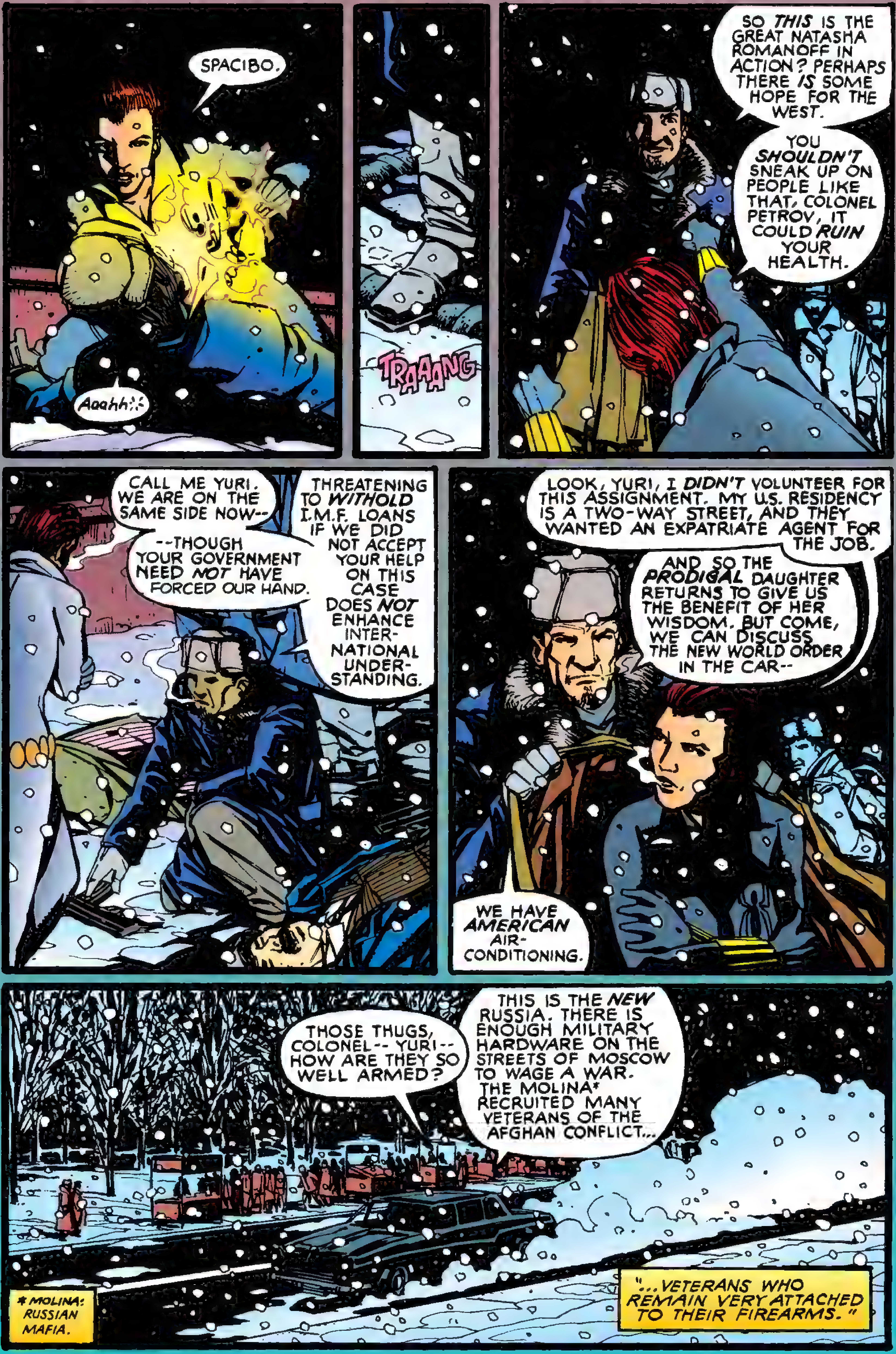
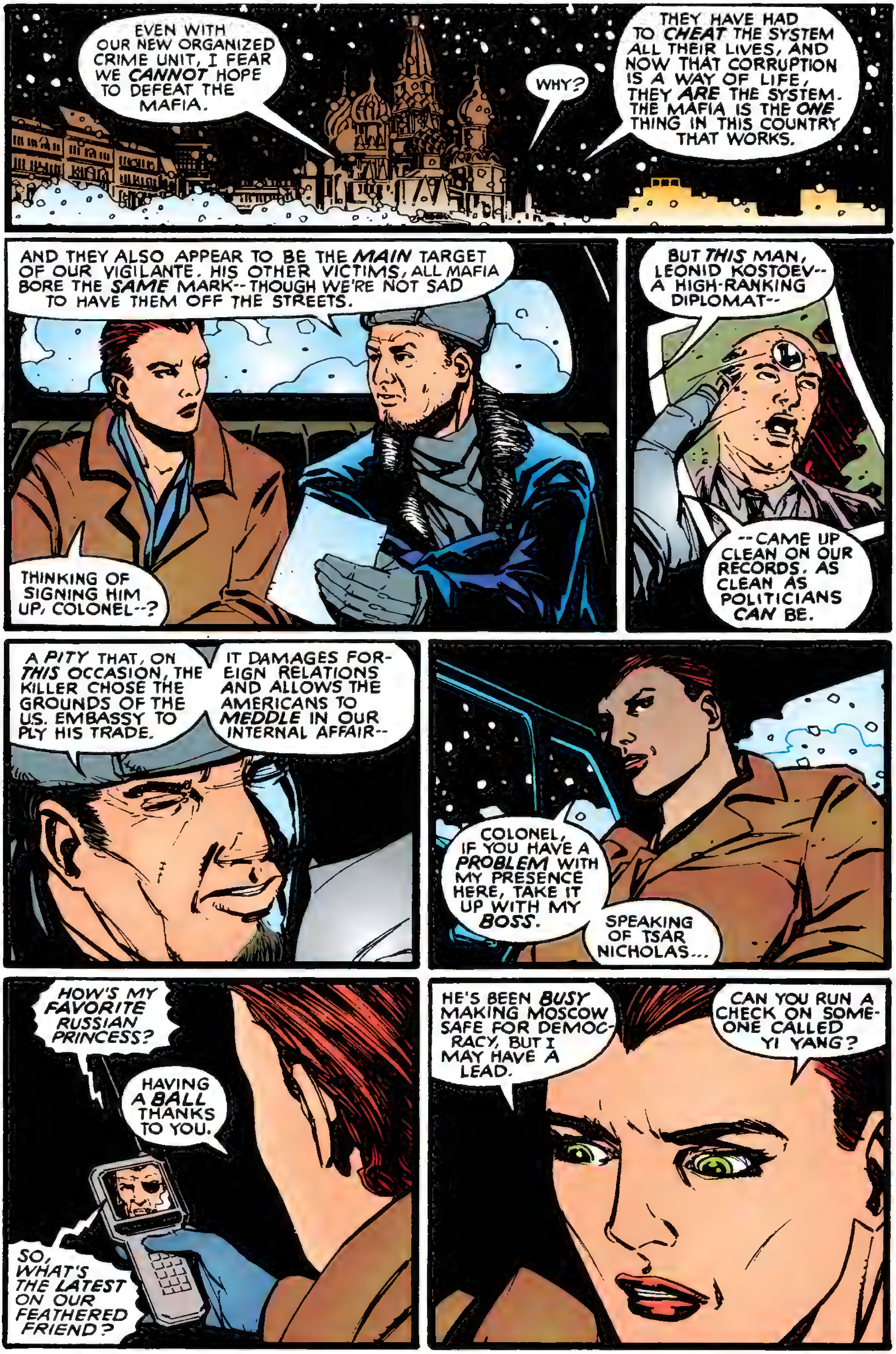
MOSCOW UNIVERSITY. DEAD OF WINTER.
"THINGS CHANGE.
"ONE MINUTE I'M PLAYING SUPER HERO ON THE STREETS OF NEW YORK THE NEXT I'M FREE-LANCING FOR SHIELD IN MOSCOW...
"...AND IT SEEMS I'VE ALREADY OVER-STAYED MY WELCOME."

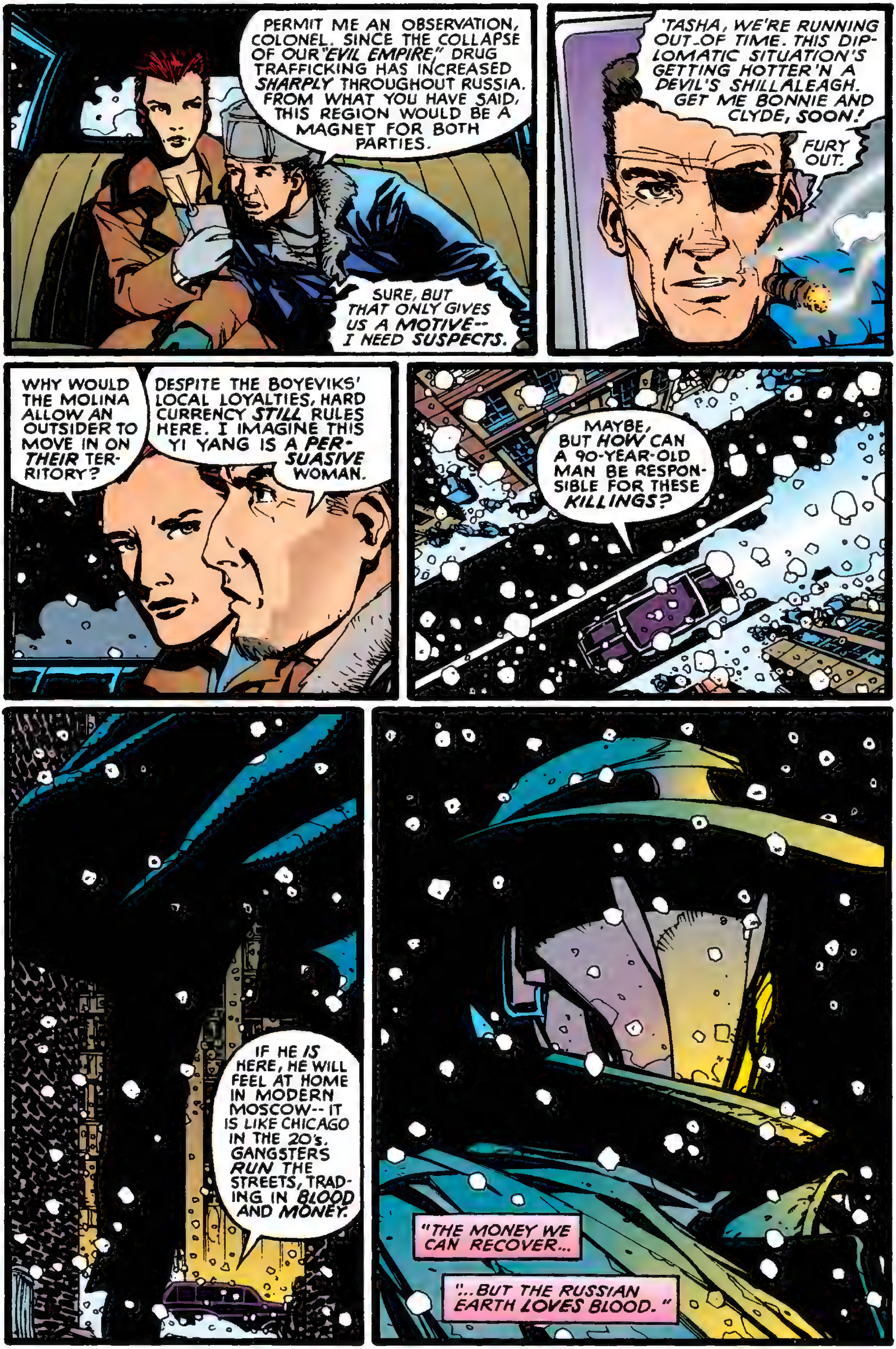
"MAYBE IT WAS SOMETHING I SAID?
"OR THE WAY I SAID IT?
"TIME FOR THE DIRECT APPROACH."
IS THAT ANY WAY TO TREAT A LADY?
YOU BOYEVIKS* NEED A LESSON IN MANNERS.
*BOYEVIK: MAFIA SOLDIER.
POST-COMMUNIST RUSSIA'S GOT A LOT TO ANSWER FOR.
ONCE MORE: WHO IS BLACKBIRD?
I... I... DO NOT KNOW. I--
YOU PLACE TOO LITTLE VALUE ON YOUR LIFE, TOVARISCH.
NO! NO! WAIT! I REMEMBER!


"TWO DAYS AGO, HE... HE CAME RIGHT INTO OUR MIDST WITHOUT FEAR--AND HE SPOKE WITH A VOICE TO CHILL THE SOUL."
WHERE ISSS YI YANG?
"OUR LAUGHTER WAS CUT SHORT.
"WE DID NOT SEE THE BLADES UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE... FAR TOO LATE.
"THAT NIGHT THE ANGEL OF DEATH MOVED AMONG US.
"THEN THE DARKNESS CONSUMED HIM...
"...AND ME."


SPACIBO.
Aaahh!
TRAAANG
SO *THIS* IS THE GREAT NATASHA ROMANOFF IN ACTION? PERHAPS THERE *IS* SOME HOPE FOR THE WEST.
YOU *SHOULDN'T* SNEAK UP ON PEOPLE LIKE THAT, COLONEL PETROV, IT COULD *RUIN* YOUR HEALTH.
CALL ME YURI. WE ARE ON THE SAME SIDE NOW--
--THOUGH YOUR GOVERNMENT NEED *NOT* HAVE FORCED OUR HAND.
THREATENING TO *WITHOLD* I.M.F. LOANS IF WE DID NOT ACCEPT YOUR HELP ON THIS CASE DOES *NOT* ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING.
LOOK, YURI, I *DIDN'T* VOLUNTEER FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT. MY U.S. RESIDENCY IS A TWO-WAY STREET, AND THEY WANTED AN EXPATRIATE AGENT FOR THE JOB.
AND SO THE *PRODIGAL* DAUGHTER RETURNS TO GIVE US THE BENEFIT OF HER WISDOM. BUT COME, WE CAN DISCUSS THE NEW WORLD ORDER IN THE CAR--
WE HAVE *AMERICAN* AIR-CONDITIONING.
THOSE THUGS, COLONEL-- YURI-- HOW ARE THEY SO WELL ARMED?
THIS IS THE *NEW* RUSSIA. THERE IS ENOUGH MILITARY HARDWARE ON THE STREETS OF MOSCOW TO WAGE A WAR. THE MOLINA* RECRUITED MANY VETERANS OF THE AFGHAN CONFLICT...
"...VETERANS WHO REMAIN VERY ATTACHED TO THEIR FIREARMS."
* MOLINA: RUSSIAN MAFIA.

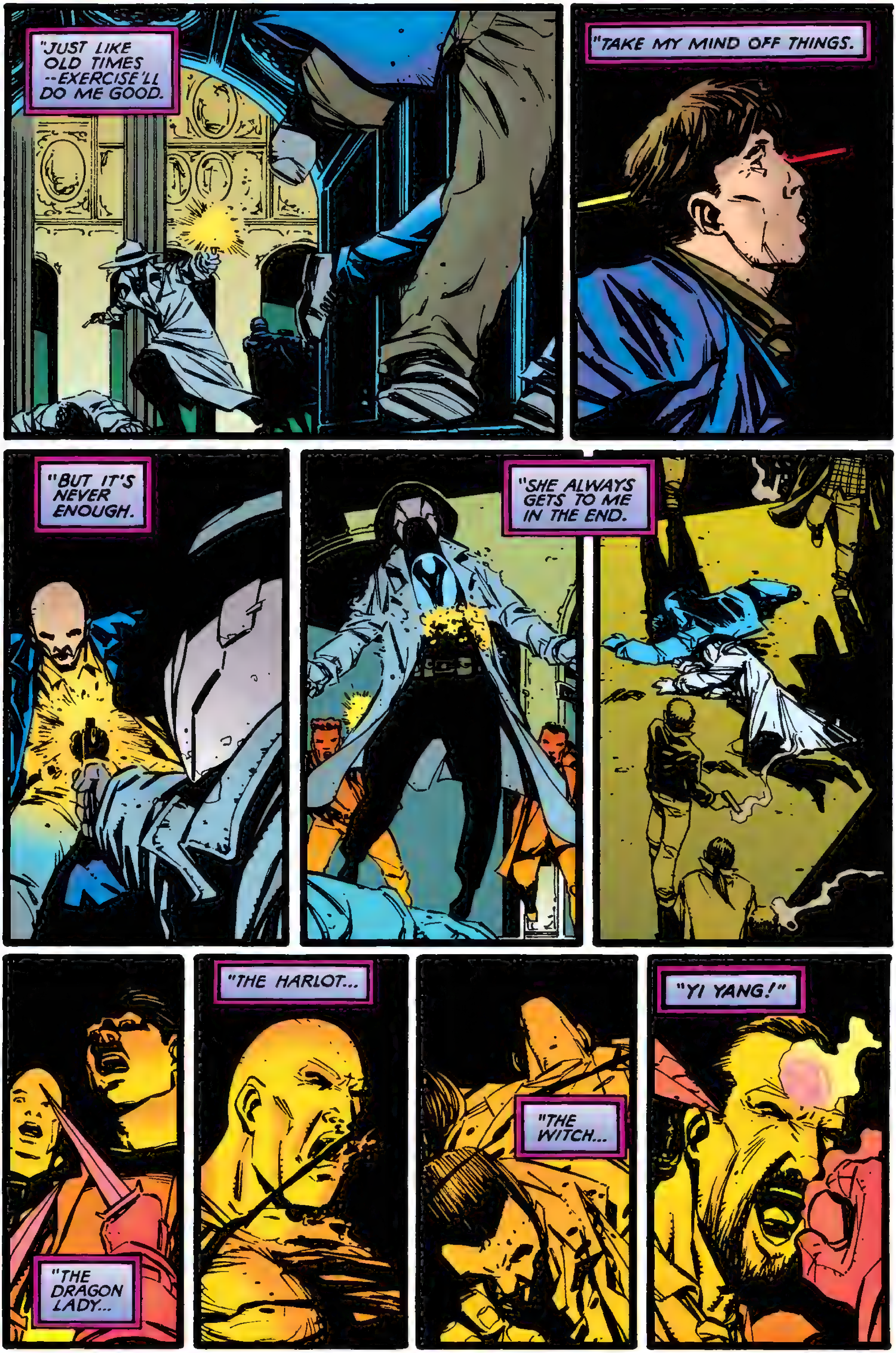

EVEN WITH OUR NEW ORGANIZED CRIME UNIT, I FEAR WE *CANNOT* HOPE TO DEFEAT THE MAFIA.
WHY?
THEY HAVE HAD TO *CHEAT* THE SYSTEM ALL THEIR LIVES, AND NOW THAT CORRUPTION IS A WAY OF LIFE, THEY *ARE* THE SYSTEM. THE MAFIA IS THE *ONE* THING IN THIS COUNTRY THAT WORKS.
AND THEY ALSO APPEAR TO BE THE *MAIN* TARGET OF OUR VIGILANTE. HIS OTHER VICTIMS, ALL MAFIA BORE THE *SAME* MARK--THOUGH WE'RE NOT SAD TO HAVE THEM OFF THE STREETS.
THINKING OF SIGNING HIM UP, COLONEL--?
BUT *THIS* MAN, LEONID KOSTOEV--A HIGH-RANKING DIPLOMAT--
--CAME UP CLEAN ON OUR RECORDS. AS CLEAN AS POLITICIANS *CAN* BE.
A *PITY* THAT, ON *THIS* OCCASION, THE KILLER CHOSE THE GROUNDS OF THE U.S. EMBASSY TO PLY HIS TRADE.
IT DAMAGES FOREIGN RELATIONS AND ALLOWS THE AMERICANS TO *MEDDLE* IN OUR INTERNAL AFFAIR--
COLONEL, IF YOU HAVE A *PROBLEM* WITH MY PRESENCE HERE, TAKE IT UP WITH MY *BOSS*.
SPEAKING OF TSAR NICHOLAS...
HOW'S MY FAVORITE RUSSIAN PRINCESS?
HAVING A *BALL* THANKS TO YOU.
SO, WHAT'S THE LATEST ON OUR FEATHERED FRIEND?
HE'S BEEN *BUSY* MAKING MOSCOW SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY, BUT I MAY HAVE A LEAD.
CAN YOU RUN A CHECK ON SOMEONE CALLED YI YANG?

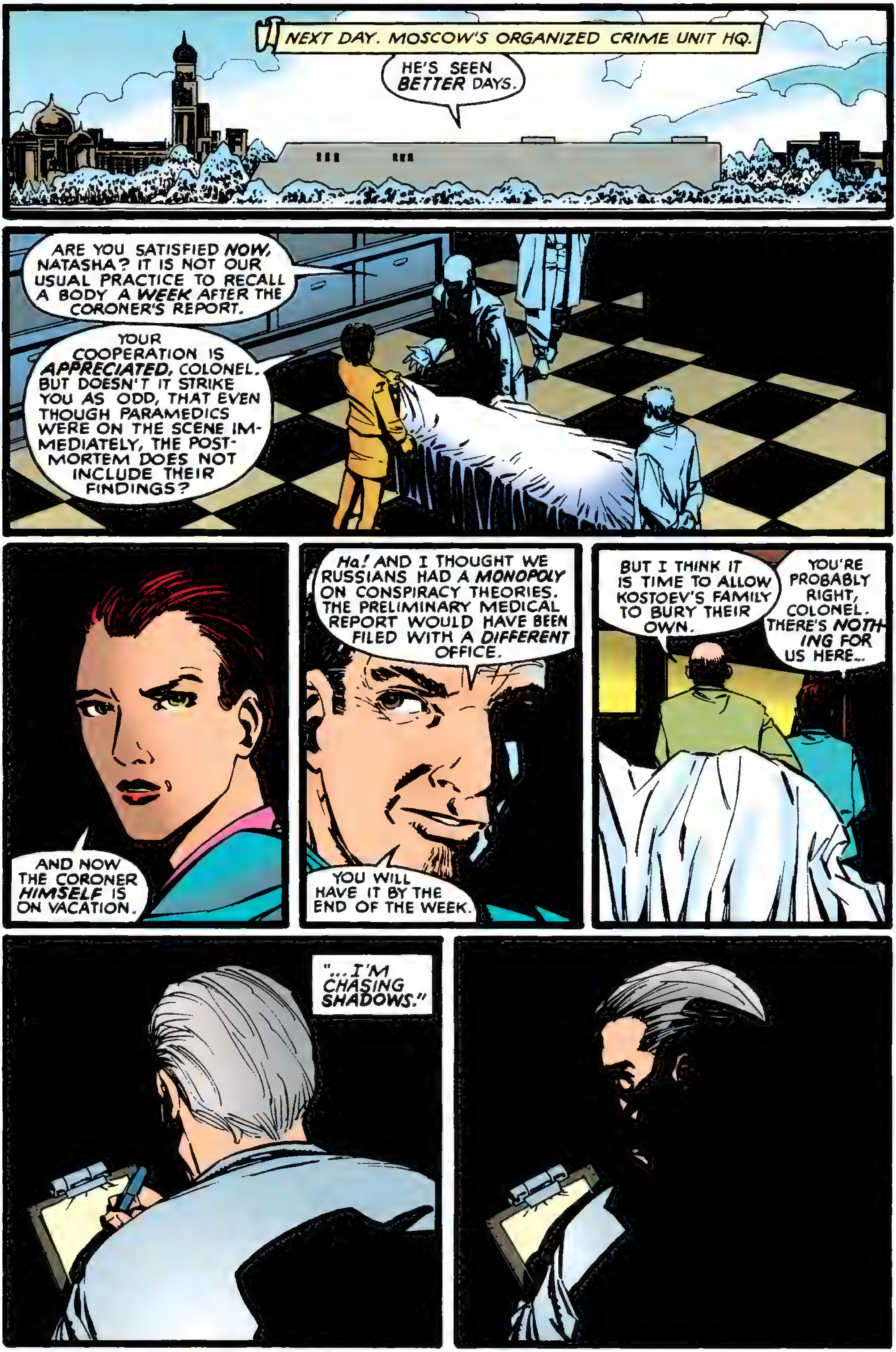
MINUTES LATER.
"YI YANG, eh? THIS **CONFIRMS** OUR HUNCH, THAT THIS BLACKBIRD IS SOMEHOW TIED IN WITH A MASKED **CRIMEFIGHTER** BY THE NAME OF NIGHT RAVEN, WHO OPERATED IN CHICAGO AND NEW YORK IN THE '30's.
"WHOEVER OUR BIRD IS, HE'S GOT THE RAVEN'S M.O. DOWN PAT-- A VICIOUS DRUG-BUSTING STREAK THAT MAKES THE PUNISHER LOOK LIKE A BOY SCOUT... **AND** THAT CORNY BRANDING STUNT.
"SEEMS HE **ALSO** HAD AN UNHEALTHY OBSESSION WITH THIS YI YANG; A FEMME FATALE WHO HEADED UP NEW YORK'S OLD DRAGON TONG, WHICH WAS UP TO ITS FANGS IN OPIUM SMUGGLING.
"BUT FROM **EYEWITNESS** ACCOUNTS, NIGHT RAVEN WAS TAKEN OUT OF ACTION THE **HARD** WAY, BY YI YANG'S HOODS--SWISS CHEESED AT HER PAD ON THE EAST RIVER, THOUGH HIS BODY WAS NEVER FOUND.
"THE DAME WAS LUCKIER--OPIUM'S KEPT HER YOUNG. YI YANG CROPS UP IN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS RIGHT UP TO THE 1980's.
"AND THAT'S WHEN THE T.R.A.C.E.* RECORDS ON NIGHT RAVEN'S RETURN KICK IN. BUT WE CAN'T ATTACH ANY **CREDENCE** TO THEIR FINDINGS-- T.R.A.C.E. WAS A PENNY ANTE OUTFIT THAT WAS PUT OUT OF ITS MISERY YEARS AGO.
"AND NOW THE TWO GERIATRIC LOVEBIRDS HAVE POPPED UP IN MOSCOW. SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE'S KEEPING THE FEUD ALIVE."
*T.R.A.C.E.--TACTICAL RESEARCH AND CULTURAL EXAMINATION.

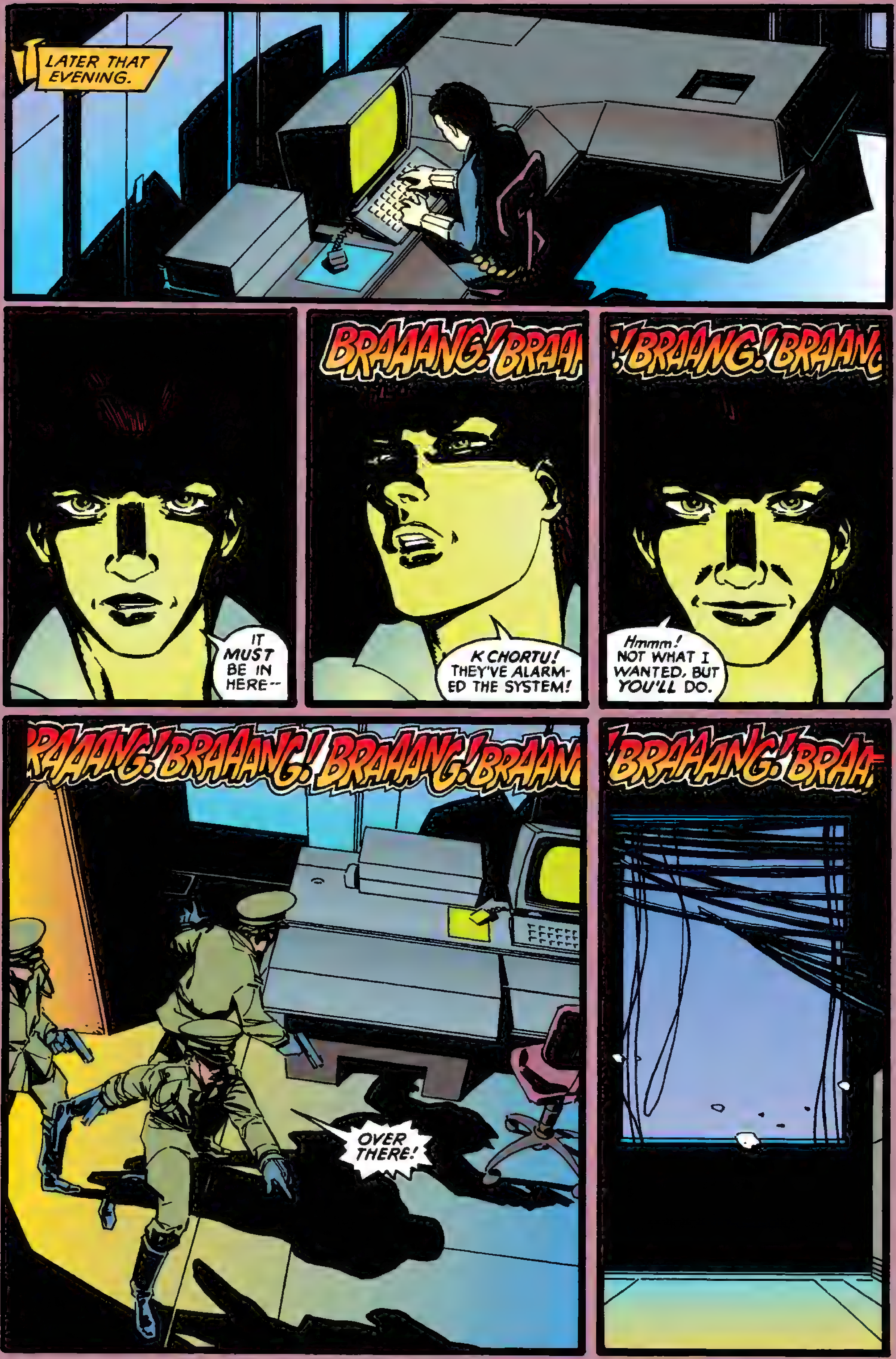

PERMIT ME AN OBSERVATION, COLONEL. SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF OUR "EVIL EMPIRE," DRUG TRAFFICKING HAS INCREASED SHARPLY THROUGHOUT RUSSIA. FROM WHAT YOU HAVE SAID, THIS REGION WOULD BE A MAGNET FOR BOTH PARTIES.
SURE, BUT THAT ONLY GIVES US A MOTIVE-- I NEED SUSPECTS.
'TASHA, WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME. THIS DIPLOMATIC SITUATION'S GETTING HOTTER'N A DEVIL'S SHILLALEAGH. GET ME BONNIE AND CLYDE, SOON!
FURY OUT.
WHY WOULD THE MOLINA ALLOW AN OUTSIDER TO MOVE IN ON THEIR TERRITORY?
DESPITE THE BOYEVIKS' LOCAL LOYALTIES, HARD CURRENCY STILL RULES HERE. I IMAGINE THIS YI YANG IS A PERSUASIVE WOMAN.
MAYBE, BUT HOW CAN A 90-YEAR-OLD MAN BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE KILLINGS?
IF HE IS HERE, HE WILL FEEL AT HOME IN MODERN MOSCOW-- IT IS LIKE CHICAGO IN THE 20's. GANGSTERS RUN THE STREETS, TRADING IN BLOOD AND MONEY.
"THE MONEY WE CAN RECOVER...
"...BUT THE RUSSIAN EARTH LOVES BLOOD."

"PACK UP ALL MY CARE AND WOE...
CLICK
"HERE I GO SINGING LOW...
CLICK
"BYE BYE..."
BLAM

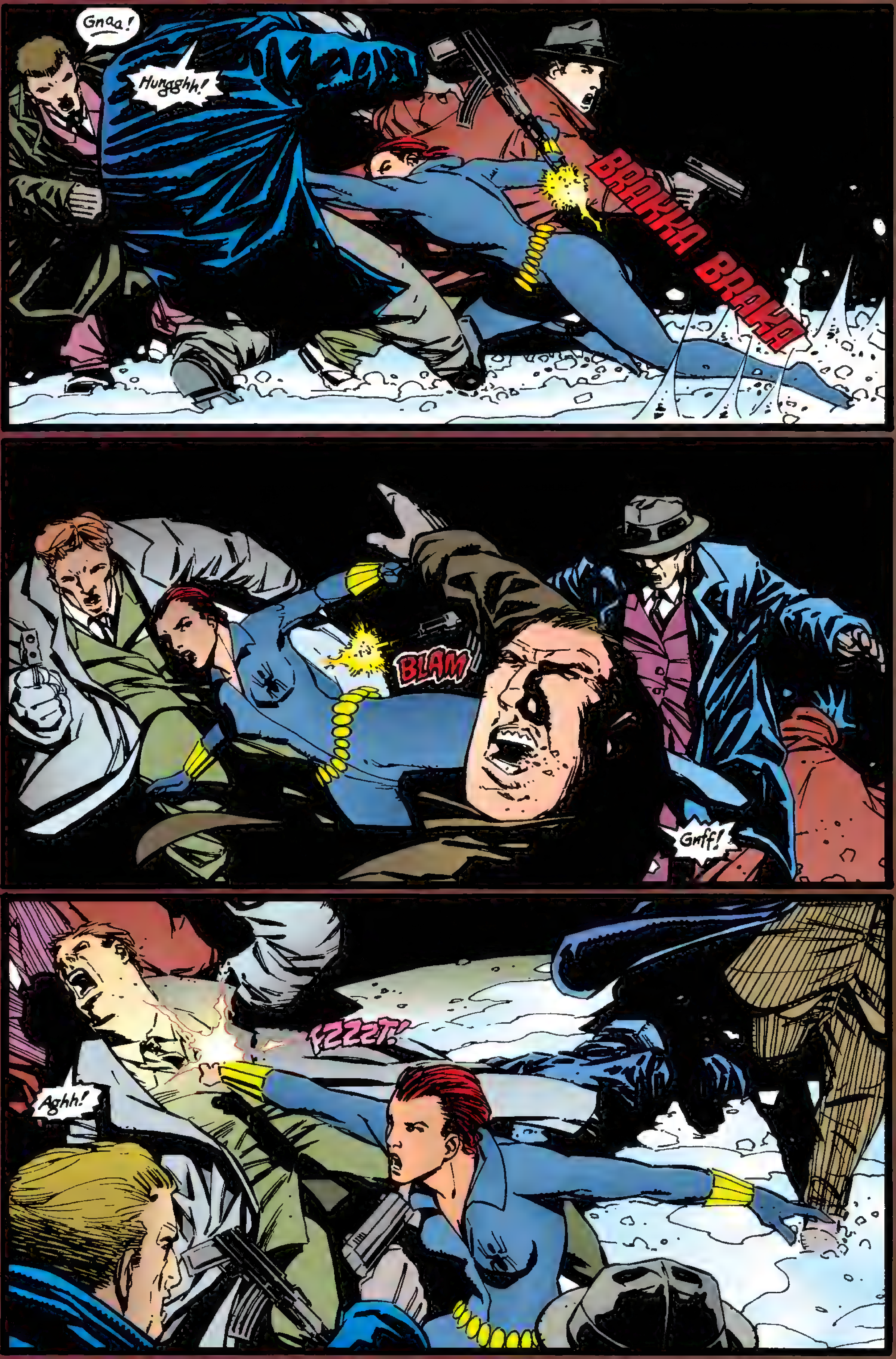
MAYAKOVSKAYA METRO STATION. THE MUGGING HOUR.
BLACKBIRD!


"JUST LIKE OLD TIMES --EXERCISE'LL DO ME GOOD.
"TAKE MY MIND OFF THINGS.
"BUT IT'S NEVER ENOUGH.
"SHE ALWAYS GETS TO ME IN THE END.
"THE DRAGON LADY...
"THE HARLOT...
"THE WITCH...
"YI YANG!"


NEXT DAY. MOSCOW'S ORGANIZED CRIME UNIT HQ.
HE'S SEEN *BETTER* DAYS.
ARE YOU SATISFIED *NOW*, NATASHA? IT IS NOT OUR USUAL PRACTICE TO RECALL A BODY A *WEEK* AFTER THE CORONER'S REPORT.
YOUR COOPERATION IS ***APPRECIATED***, COLONEL. BUT DOESN'T IT STRIKE YOU AS ODD, THAT EVEN THOUGH PARAMEDICS WERE ON THE SCENE IMMEDIATELY, THE POST-MORTEM DOES NOT INCLUDE THEIR FINDINGS?
AND NOW THE CORONER *HIMSELF* IS ON VACATION.
Ha! AND I THOUGHT WE RUSSIANS HAD A *MONOPOLY* ON CONSPIRACY THEORIES. THE PRELIMINARY MEDICAL REPORT WOULD HAVE BEEN FILED WITH A *DIFFERENT* OFFICE.
YOU WILL HAVE IT BY THE END OF THE WEEK.
BUT I THINK IT IS TIME TO ALLOW KOSTOEV'S FAMILY TO BURY THEIR OWN.
YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT, COLONEL. THERE'S *NOTHING* FOR US HERE...
"...I'M CHASING SHADOWS."

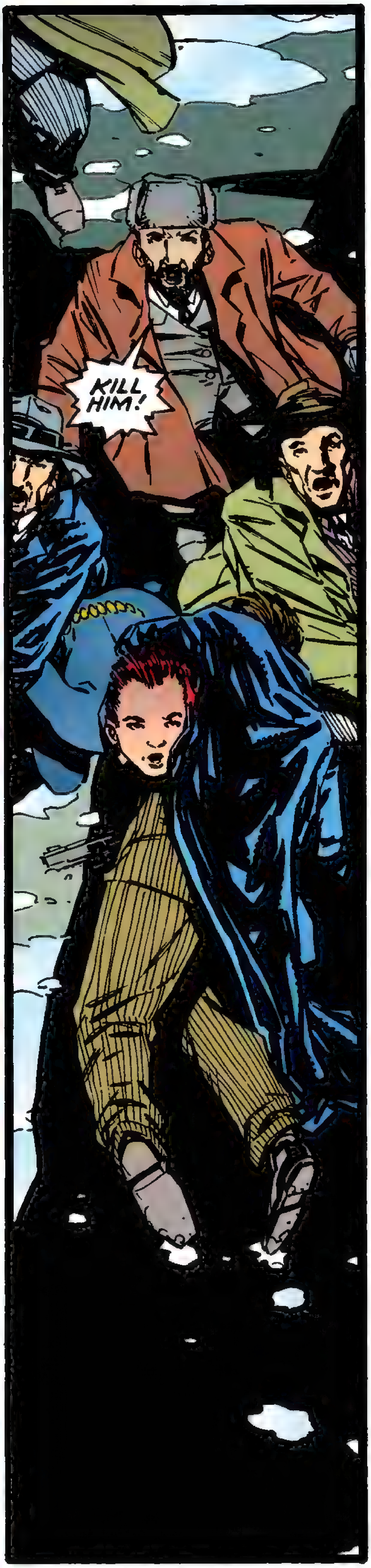

LATER THAT EVENING.
IT MUST BE IN HERE--
BRAAANG! BRAA
K CHORTU! THEY'VE ALARMED THE SYSTEM!
!BRAANG! BRAANG
Hmmm! NOT WHAT I WANTED, BUT YOU'LL DO.
RAAANG! BRAAANG! BRAAANG! BRAAN
OVER THERE!
!BRAAANG! BRAA

THE NIGHT'S SHARP CHILL RAKES AT THE WINDOW, CARRYING THE SOUND OF FEAR FROM THE STREETS BELOW.
DO THE POLICE LET *EVERYTHING* SLIP THROUGH THEIR FINGERS?
I DON'T *BELIEVE* IT!
What the--?!
SHADOWS AGAIN...
NO! NO! LET ME GO! THEY WILL *KILL* ME!
WHO WILL KILL YOU?
YOUR ROOF-TOP COM-RADES?
THEY THINK I *BETRAYED* THEM. B...BUT I DIDN'T! I... I... COULDN'T!
BE CALM-- WE CAN GIVE YOU PROTECTION. JUST *TELL* ME--
"IT IS TOO LATE..."


Gnaa!
Hungghh!
BRAKKA BRAKKA
BLAM
Gnff!
FZZZT!
Aghh!

HER ARMS! BREAK THEM! HER WEAPON WILL BE USELESS!
SUCH A PRETTY RUSSIAN FACE! PITY--
BLAM!
BLAM!
'THAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH SHADOWS. SOMEONE'S USUALLY ATTACHED TO THEM.'

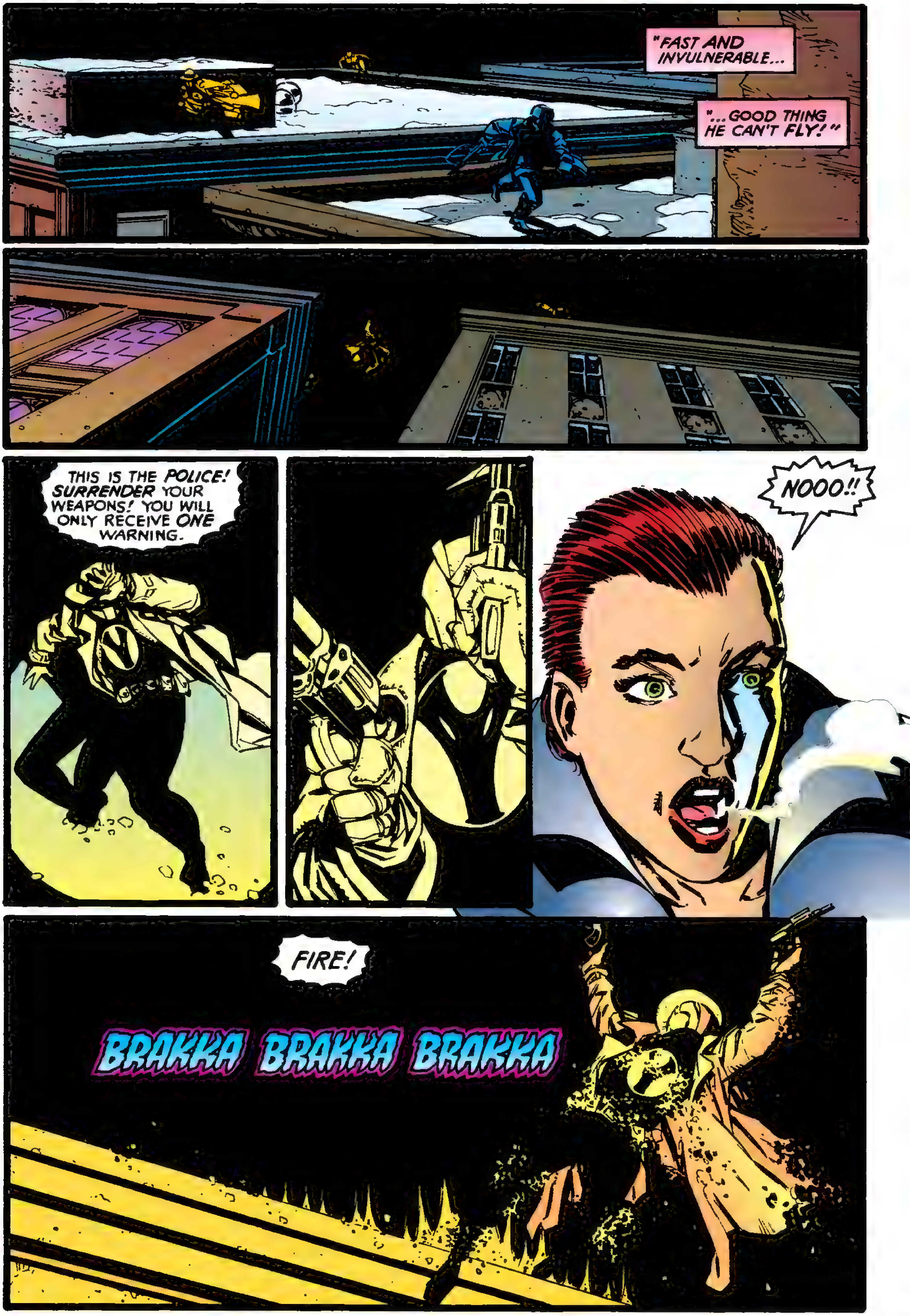
RELEASSSE HER!



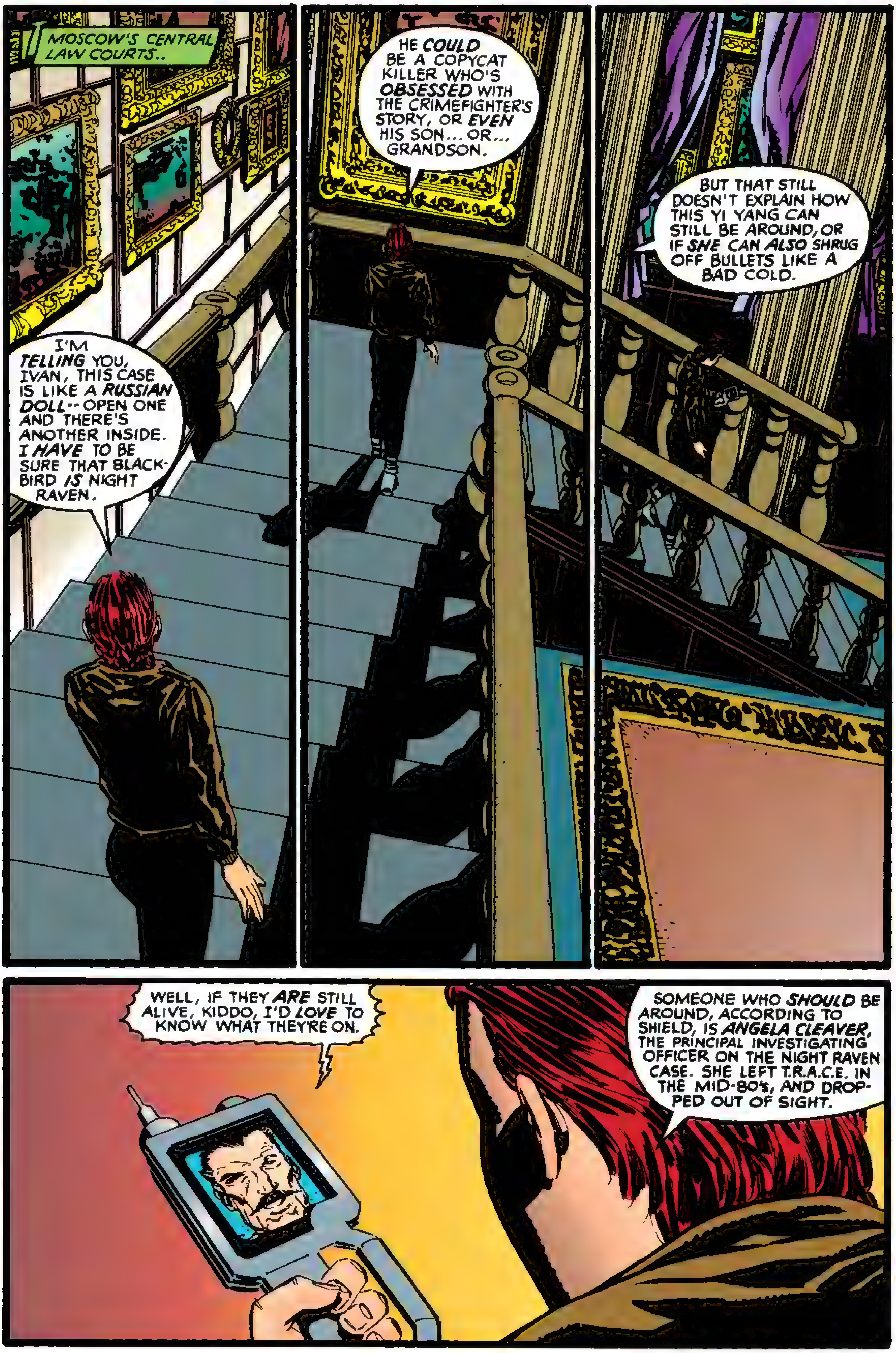
* LOOSELY ADAPTED FROM A RUSSIAN FOLKTALE, "THE NIGHT BIRD."

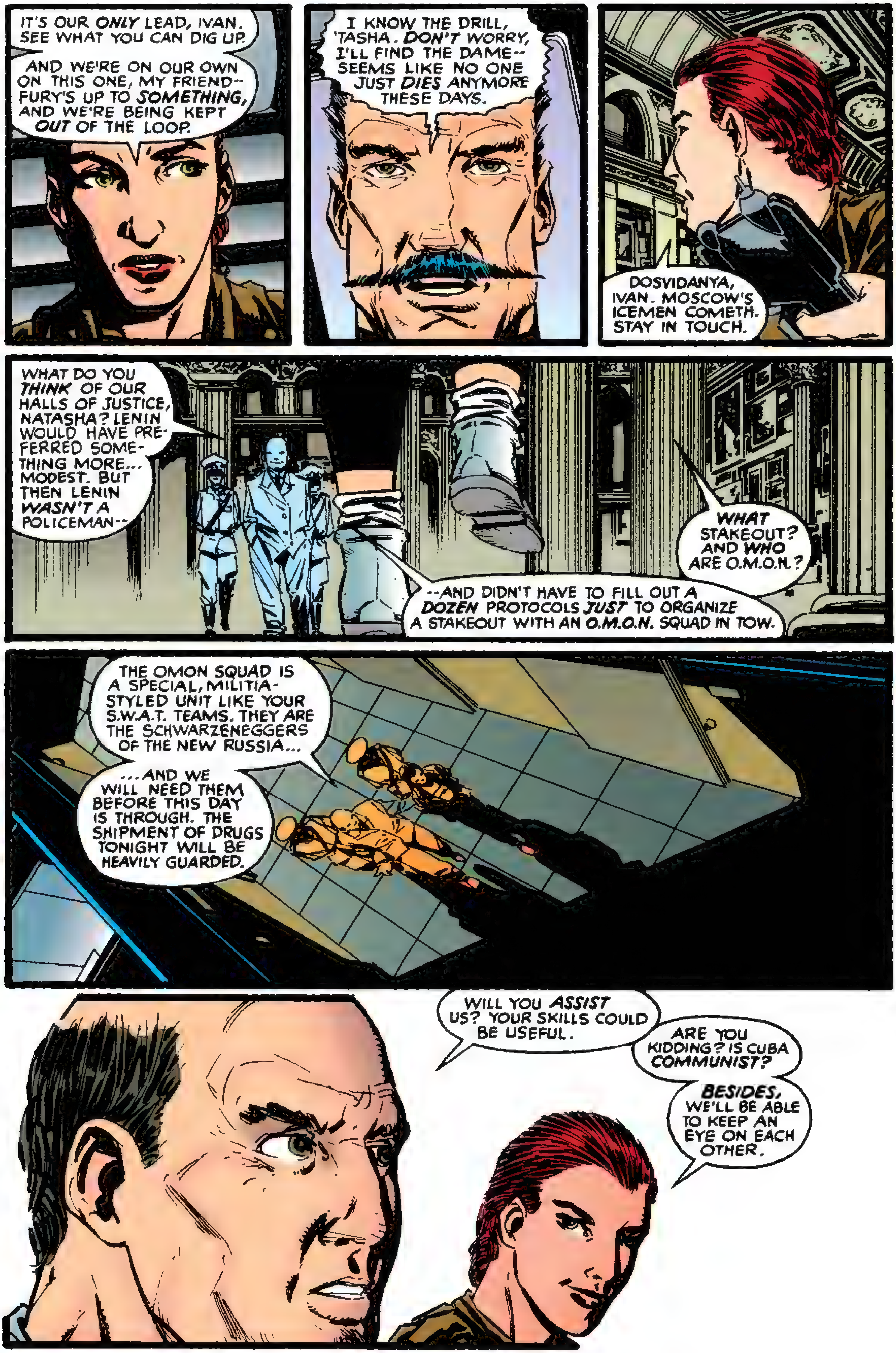
-Hurk-
"MOVES FAST FOR A MAN IN HIS NINETIES...
ARRGH!
"...WITH A GREAT SENSE OF TIMING."

YOU MUST BE BLACK BIRD... OR SHOULD I SAY NIGHT RAVEN?
HISSS!
TOUCHY!
WHERE ISSS SHE? WHERE ISSS YI YA--
PKOWW!
AAAAHH!


"FAST AND INVULNERABLE...
"...GOOD THING HE CAN'T FLY!"
THIS IS THE POLICE! SURRENDER YOUR WEAPONS! YOU WILL ONLY RECEIVE ONE WARNING.
NOOO!!
FIRE!
BRAKKA BRAKKA BRAKKA

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN* YOU CANNOT FIND HIM, GREGOR? THERE IS *NO* WAY HE COULD HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM THAT. *WIDEN* THE SEARCH!!
PARDON THE INTRUSION, YURI, THIS BLACKBIRD SEEMS TO SHRUG OFF BULLETS WITH FEW ILL EFFECTS.
YOU *HAVE* HEARD OF BULLETPROOF VESTS IN THE WEST?
THOSE GOONS WERE USING *AK 47's* AND *KALISHNKOVS* AT CLOSE RANGE. YOU KNOW OF ANY PADDING WHICH CAN STAND UP TO *THAT* KIND OF TREATMENT?
SOMETIMES WE ONLY BELIEVE WHAT WE *WANT* TO SEE.
INCIDENTALLY, THERE WAS A BREAK-IN AT O.C.U.'s COMPUTER CENTER TONIGHT. YOU WOULDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT *THAT,* WOULD YOU?
NO, AND I *DON'T* LIKE YOUR LINE OF QUESTIONING. THERE MUST BE MANY-- OUTSIDE AND *INSIDE* THE FORCE -- WHO MIGHT WANT POLICE INTELLIGENCE.
BESIDES, HOW DID THOSE THUGS YOU ARRESTED AT THE UNIVERSITY *YESTERDAY* GET BACK ON THE STREETS SO *QUICKLY?*
AS IN AMERICA, THE MAFIA HAVE BOUGHT THE FINEST LAWYERS.
AND HAVE THEY BOUGHT THE BEST *POLICE,* TOO?
IT IS NOT UNHEARD OF-- A POLICEMAN'S WAGE IS BARELY LOOSE CHANGE FOR A BOYEVIK.
I WILL SEE YOU TOMORROW AT THE LAW COURTS. GREGOR WILL DRIVE YOU HOME IN STYLE. GOOD NIGHT.


MOSCOW'S CENTRAL LAW COURTS..
I'M TELLING YOU, IVAN, THIS CASE IS LIKE A RUSSIAN DOLL-- OPEN ONE AND THERE'S ANOTHER INSIDE. I HAVE TO BE SURE THAT BLACKBIRD IS NIGHT RAVEN.
HE COULD BE A COPYCAT KILLER WHO'S OBSESSED WITH THE CRIMEFIGHTER'S STORY, OR EVEN HIS SON... OR... GRANDSON.
BUT THAT STILL DOESN'T EXPLAIN HOW THIS YI YANG CAN STILL BE AROUND, OR IF SHE CAN ALSO SHRUG OFF BULLETS LIKE A BAD COLD.
WELL, IF THEY ARE STILL ALIVE, KIDDO, I'D LOVE TO KNOW WHAT THEY'RE ON.
SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE AROUND, ACCORDING TO SHIELD, IS ANGELA CLEAVER, THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATING OFFICER ON THE NIGHT RAVEN CASE. SHE LEFT T.R.A.C.E. IN THE MID-80's, AND DROPPED OUT OF SIGHT.


IT'S OUR ONLY LEAD, IVAN. SEE WHAT YOU CAN DIG UP.
AND WE'RE ON OUR OWN ON THIS ONE, MY FRIEND-- FURY'S UP TO SOMETHING, AND WE'RE BEING KEPT OUT OF THE LOOP.
I KNOW THE DRILL, 'TASHA. DON'T WORRY, I'LL FIND THE DAME-- SEEMS LIKE NO ONE JUST DIES ANYMORE THESE DAYS.
DOSVIDANYA, IVAN. MOSCOW'S ICEMEN COMETH. STAY IN TOUCH.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF OUR HALLS OF JUSTICE, NATASHA? LENIN WOULD HAVE PREFERRED SOMETHING MORE... MODEST. BUT THEN LENIN WASN'T A POLICEMAN--
--AND DIDN'T HAVE TO FILL OUT A DOZEN PROTOCOLS JUST TO ORGANIZE A STAKEOUT WITH AN O.M.O.N. SQUAD IN TOW.
WHAT STAKEOUT? AND WHO ARE O.M.O.N.?
THE OMON SQUAD IS A SPECIAL, MILITIA-STYLED UNIT LIKE YOUR S.W.A.T. TEAMS. THEY ARE THE SCHWARZENEGGERS OF THE NEW RUSSIA...
...AND WE WILL NEED THEM BEFORE THIS DAY IS THROUGH. THE SHIPMENT OF DRUGS TONIGHT WILL BE HEAVILY GUARDED.
WILL YOU ASSIST US? YOUR SKILLS COULD BE USEFUL.
ARE YOU KIDDING? IS CUBA COMMUNIST?
BESIDES, WE'LL BE ABLE TO KEEP AN EYE ON EACH OTHER.

SIBERIA. YI YANG'S RUSSIAN REFUGE.
IN THE HOUSE OF "NEITHER FLAG NOR WIND," THE STALE, BITTER SCENT OF OPIUM DRIFTS IN THE COOLING AIR. TWO LOVERS UNCOIL... SLOWLY... SILENTLY-- BOTH DARING THE OTHER TO SPEAK.
ARE YOU STILL AFRAID MY LOVE? AFTER ALL YOU HAVE SEEN... AND CARESSED?
YOU ARE MY WARMTH IN THIS PALACE OF ICE. WE SHALL NOT REMAIN HERE LONG.
EVERYTHING IS IN PLACE, NOW, AND THE FOOLS EAGERLY PLAY THEIR PART...
...INCLUDING OUR BIRD OF PREY.
AND HE IS MINE!

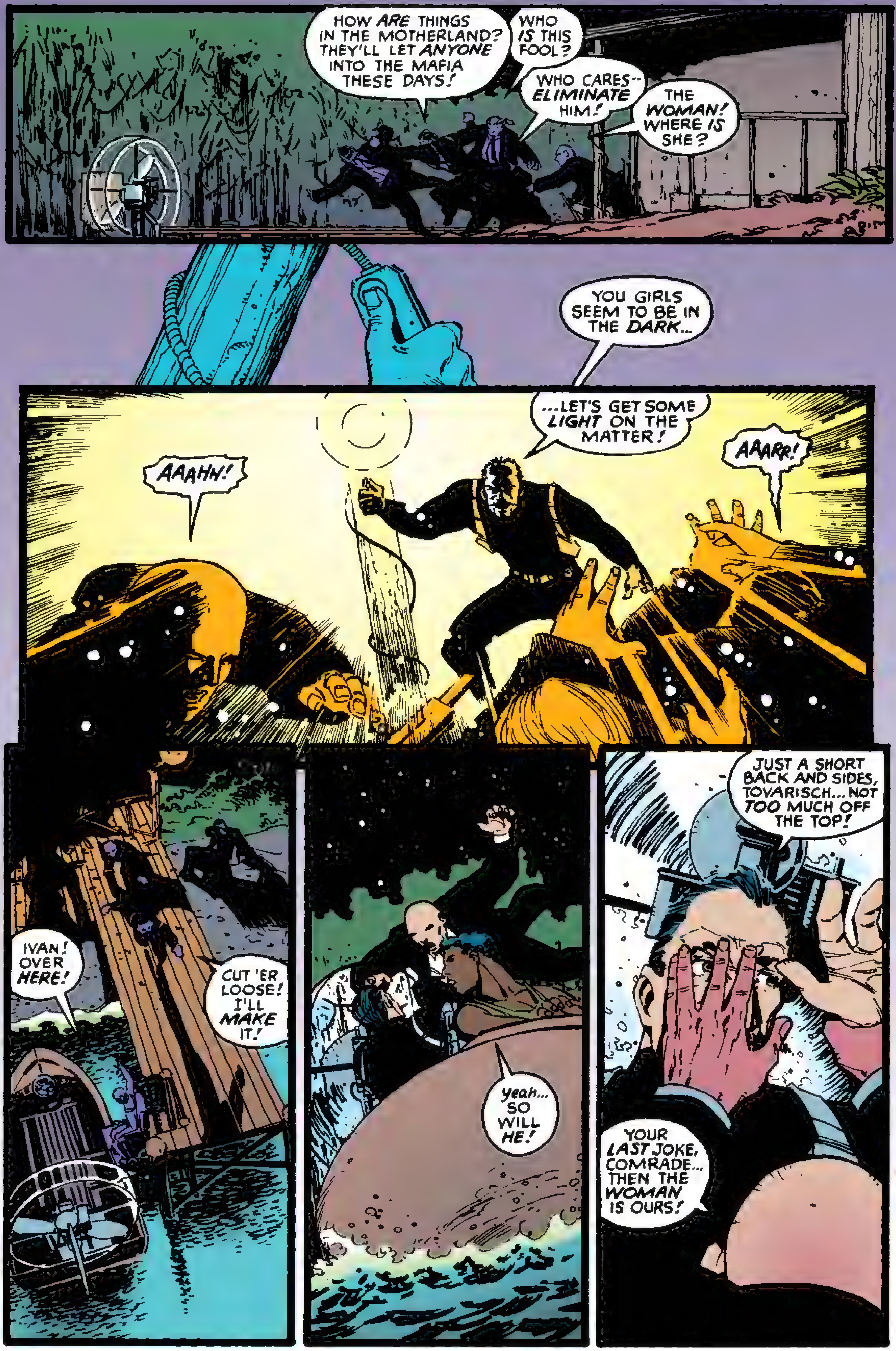
LAFITTE, LOUISIANA, ON THE EDGE OF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA.
THE TIDES RULE HERE, RELENTLESSLY TUGGING THE LAND AWAY FROM ITS ALLUVIAL MOORINGS.
SO MUCH OF THE AREA IS BELOW SEA LEVEL THAT WHEN EARLY SETTLERS BURIED THEIR DEAD, THE CORPSES EVENTUALLY FLOATED TO THE SURFACE.
NOTHING STAYS BURIED FOREVER.
"GUESS I KNEW THAT BUSINESS IN UPSTATE NEW YORK WOULD CATCH UP WITH ME SOMETIME.
"'A FEW LOOSE ENDS', THEY SAID. 'WE'LL TAKE CARE OF IT. YOU JUST GET SOME R&R -- YOU'VE EARNED IT.'
"THEY MEANT REST AND RETIREMENT.
"HOPE THIS THING ISN'T AS RUSTY AS I AM.
"AND SABRE'S NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER EITH-- "

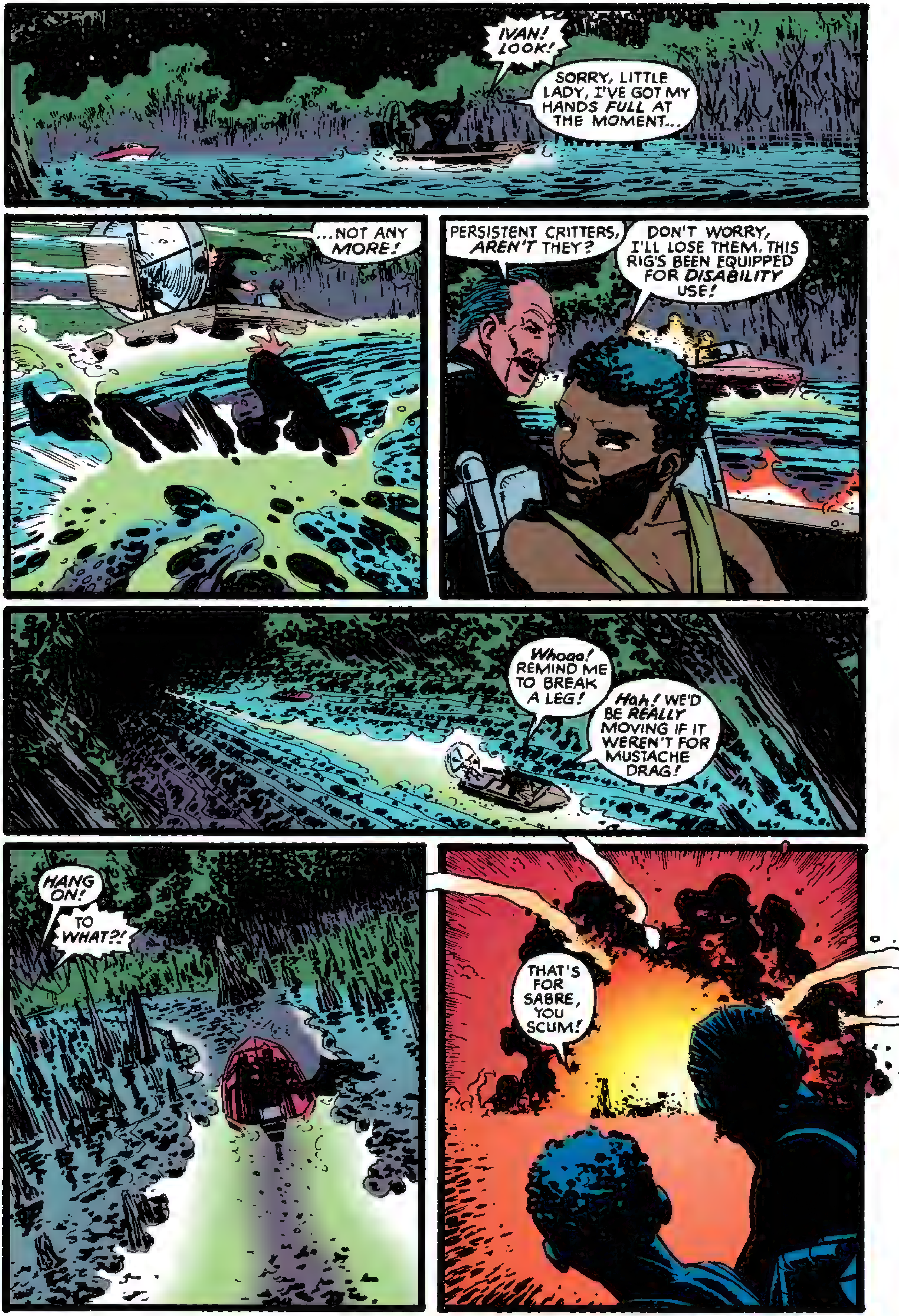
CRASH
Oof!
LOOK, I TOLD YOUR PALS I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ANY NIGHT RAVEN, AND I'VE BEEN OUT OF THE SERVICE FOR TEN YEARS, SO GET THE HECK OUT OF MY HOUSE!
I'M NOT SURE WHO THE OTHERS ARE, BUT I'M WITH SHIELD.
YOU'RE NOT AN EASY DAME TO FIND. YOU HIDING FROM SOMEONE?
NOT UNTIL YOU AND YOUR RUSSIAN BUDDIES SHOWED UP.

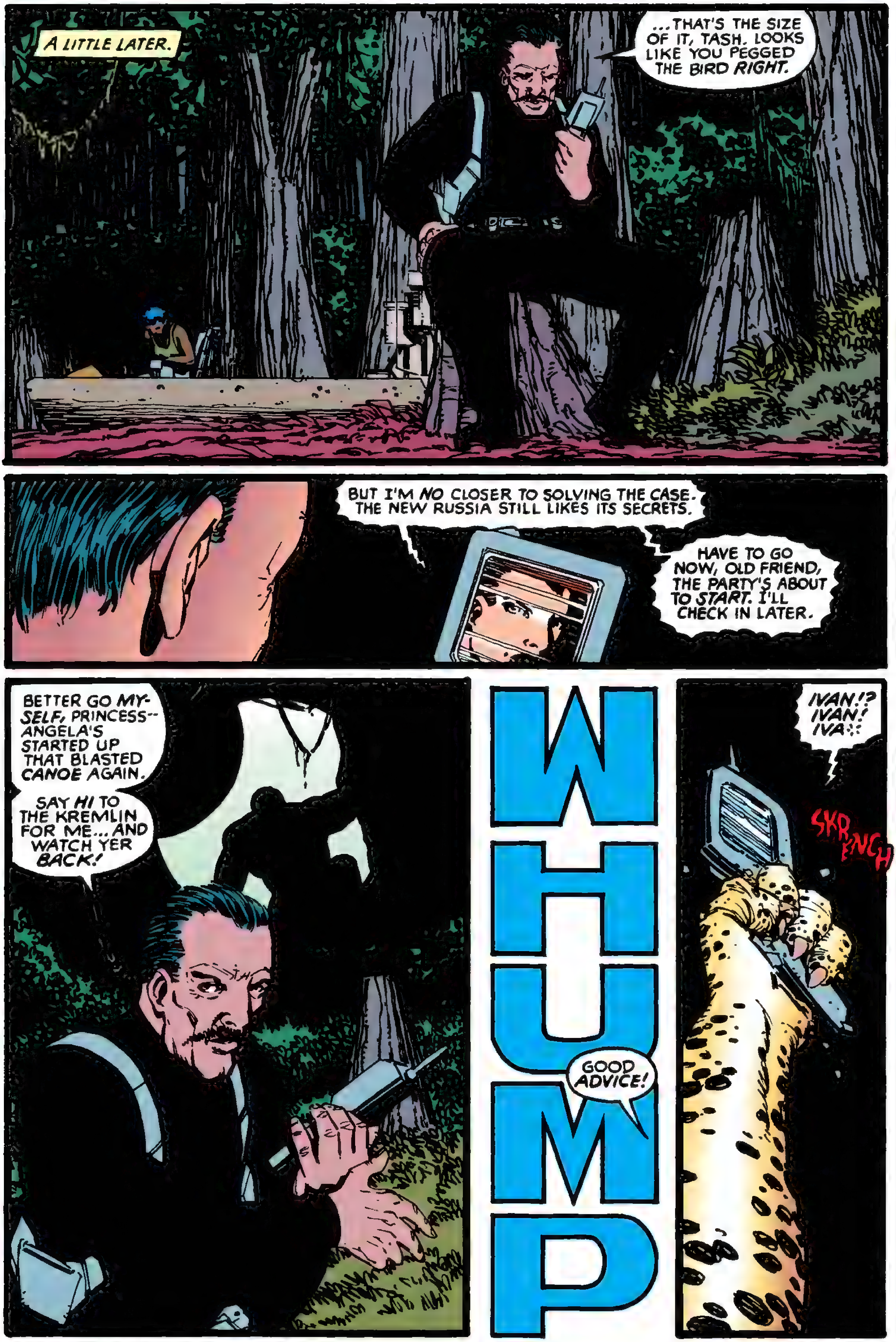
IF MY EX-COUNTRYMEN HAVE BEEN HERE, THEN THAT YI YANG BROAD'S ALSO ON TA YA.
YI YANG? THEN NIGHT RAVEN IS BACK IN BUSINESS--
IN MOSCOW. BUT HOW CAN THIS METHUSELAH STILL EAT BULLETS FOR BREAKFAST?
OH, HE'LL BE AROUND LONG AFTER WE'VE SIGNED UP WITH THE CELESTIAL CHORUS.
IF YOU GOT THIS FAR, THEN YOU KNOW ABOUT T.R.A.C.E., AND HOW I COLLECTED A COUPLE OF COMMENDATIONS AND THESE USELESS GAMS IN THE LINE OF DUTY.
WELL, IT ISN'T THE FULL STORY-- NOT BY HALF...
"NIGHT RAVEN WAS MY GREAT WHITE HOPE. MY CHANCE TO PROVE MYSELF AFTER 20 YEARS OF BEING SHUNTED AROUND THE BACKWATERS OF THE SECRET SERVICE. BLACK WOMEN AREN'T EXACTLY PRIME AGENT MATERIAL.
"THE DOSSIER WAS RIDDLED WITH INCONSISTENCIES AND FALSE LEADS. IF THESE EYEWITNESS REPORTS WERE ACCURATE, HE'D HAVE BEEN OVER 80 YEARS OLD! NOW HE SEEMED TO BE CROPPING UP IN ALL THE HOT SPOTS.
"THERE WAS SOMETHING HERE... SOMETHING THAT REFUSED TO DIE.
"HOW RIGHT I WAS!
"THE NIGHT SLAMMED HIM STRAIGHT INTO MY LAP...
"...AND SERVED HIM UP LIKE A PIECE OF DEAD MEAT. AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT THEY THOUGHT.
[MALE, CAUCASIAN, OF INDETERMINATE AGE BETWEEN 30 AND 50. SKIN AREA APPROXIMATELY 70% SCAR TISSUE; A RESULT OF MULTIPLE GUNSHOT WOUNDS, LACERATIONS AND SEVERE BURNS. LACK OF MEDICAL ATTENTION HAS CAUSED MUTATED HEALING...]
"THEN THEY TRIED TO OPEN HIM UP, AND HE TOOK IT REAL BAD!
"ME? I CHOKED LIKE A ROOKIE AND DID EVERYTHING BUT FAINT. THAT'S WHEN HE LOOKED RIGHT INTO ME... AND ALL I COULD SEE WERE HIS EYES...

"IT WAS TOO LATE TO CALL FOR BACK-UP. BESIDES, THIS HAD BECOME PERSONAL.
"WE DROVE IN SILENCE, UNTIL I MENTIONED WISCONSIN AND THE EXPLOSION THAT HAD ENGULFED YI YANG. HE ADMITTED TO KILLING HER, BUT THEN SAID SOMETHING I'LL NEVER FORGET:"
SHE MADE ME THISSS. SHE STOLE DEATH AWAY FROM ME AND IMPRISSSONED ME IN PAIN... FOREVER. WHY WOULD I NOT KILL HER?
"FOR AN INSTANT, I SWEAR HE HAD LOVED HER, BUT I HAD MY OWN TROUBLES.
"THEY FOUND US EASILY ENOUGH-- HELL, I'D TRAINED THEM. BUT I'D COME TOO FAR TO QUIT NOW.
"THEN... MY INVESTIGATION WENT UP IN FLAMES...
"...AND IT WAS ONLY THANKS TO NIGHT RAVEN THAT I DIDN'T FOLLOW IT..
"THAT WAS THE LAST I SAW OF HIM.
AFTER HE'D LEFT, THE PAIN SHOT THROUGH MY LEGS AND I'D REALIZED THIS CASE HAD COST ME MORE THAN I'D THOUGHT.
I'VE KEPT A FILE ON MY SAVIOR EVER SINCE--
--I'M STILL A PRETTY GOOD HACKER.
THIS FILE --MAY I?
I GUESS SO. HE'S BEEN A GOOD BOY, HASN'T HE, SABRE?
I'VE CHECKED INTO HIS PAST AS WELL, FOR ALL THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES NOW.
HE MAY HAVE BEEN BASED IN NEW YORK AND CHICAGO, BUT HE'S FROM SOUTHERN ALBERTA AND, I THINK, OF NATIVE AMERICAN DESCENT.
Shhh! WE'VE GOT COMPANY...

BRUDDA
BRUDDA
BRUDDA
YOU WILL COME WITH US OR WE WILL RAZE THIS HOUSE TO THE GROUND.
WHERE'S SABRE?
"AVON CALLING"...MUST BE THEIR NEW HARD SELL APPROACH.
AARGH!
G-GET IT OFF ME! GET IT OFF ME!
BLAM
BLAM
SAABRE! NOOOO!
Wha?
Urghh!
Uurff!
YOU SHOULDN'T PICK ON DAMES AND DUMB ANIMALS-- REALLY TICKS ME OFF!
LET'S TAKE THIS ARGUMENT OUTSIDE!


HOW *ARE* THINGS IN THE MOTHERLAND? THEY'LL LET *ANYONE* INTO THE MAFIA THESE DAYS!
WHO *IS* THIS FOOL?
WHO CARES-- *ELIMINATE* HIM!
THE *WOMAN!* WHERE *IS* SHE?
YOU GIRLS SEEM TO BE IN THE *DARK*...
...LET'S GET SOME *LIGHT* ON THE MATTER!
AAAHH!
AAARR!
IVAN! OVER *HERE!*
CUT 'ER LOOSE! I'LL *MAKE* IT!
yeah... SO WILL *HE!*
JUST A SHORT BACK AND SIDES, TOVARISCH... NOT *TOO* MUCH OFF THE TOP!
YOUR *LAST* JOKE, COMRADE... THEN THE *WOMAN* IS OURS!


IVAN! LOOK!
SORRY, LITTLE LADY, I'VE GOT MY HANDS FULL AT THE MOMENT...
...NOT ANY MORE!
PERSISTENT CRITTERS, AREN'T THEY?
DON'T WORRY, I'LL LOSE THEM. THIS RIG'S BEEN EQUIPPED FOR DISABILITY USE!
Whoaa! REMIND ME TO BREAK A LEG!
Hah! WE'D BE REALLY MOVING IF IT WEREN'T FOR MUSTACHE DRAG!
HANG ON!
TO WHAT?!
THAT'S FOR SABRE, YOU SCUM!


A LITTLE LATER.
...THAT'S THE SIZE OF IT, TASH. LOOKS LIKE YOU PEGGED THE BIRD *RIGHT*.
BUT I'M *NO* CLOSER TO SOLVING THE CASE. THE NEW RUSSIA STILL LIKES ITS SECRETS.
HAVE TO GO NOW, OLD FRIEND, THE PARTY'S ABOUT TO *START*. I'LL CHECK IN LATER.
BETTER GO *MYSELF*, PRINCESS-- ANGELA'S STARTED UP THAT BLASTED *CANOE* AGAIN.
SAY *HI* TO THE KREMLIN FOR ME... AND WATCH YER *BACK!*
WHUMP
GOOD ADVICE!
IVAN!? IVAN! IVA--
SKRENCH

NIGHT-TIME IN THE CITY. THE OUTSKIRTS OF MOSCOW.
...THEN THE LINE WENT DEAD. IVAN CAN LOOK AFTER HIMSELF, BUT SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT HERE -- THEY'RE ONTO OUR EVERY MOVE.
"AND WHY ARE THERE NO ARMED GUARDS DOWN THERE, IF THIS IS SUCH A BIG HAUL? MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL IT OFF--"
"ARE YOU MAD? NO! IT MUST BE TONIGHT!"
GREGOR! NOW!
THIS IS THE POLICE! SURRENDER IMMEDIATELY! WE HAVE SEALED OFF THE AREA!
"IT IS A TRAP! FALL BACK! FALL BACK!"
NO! NO! ADVANCE ON THEM! WE WILL BE SITTING TARGETS UP HERE!
RIGHT ON CUE. GUESS HE JUST COULDN'T MISS THE SHOW.
WHO?!

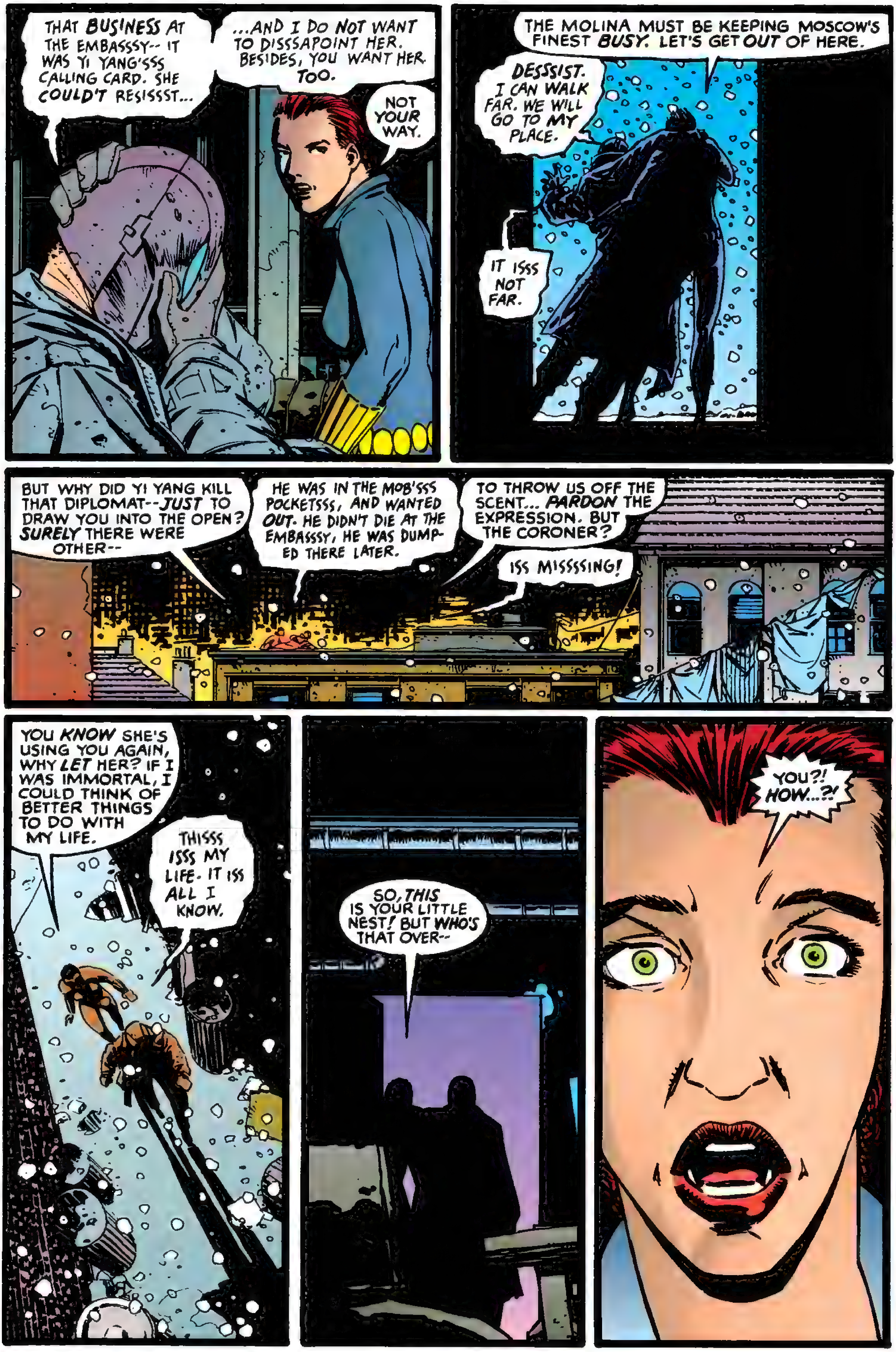
"THE CAVALRY.
"BUT EVEN HE COULD USE SOME HELP!"

"NOW IF HE'LL JUST STAY PUT...
"LENIN'S GHOST! I'M GETTING TIRED OF THIS...
"...BUT I'M NOT LOSING HIM AGAIN!

"SO MUCH FOR QUICK THINKING. NOW WHAT?"

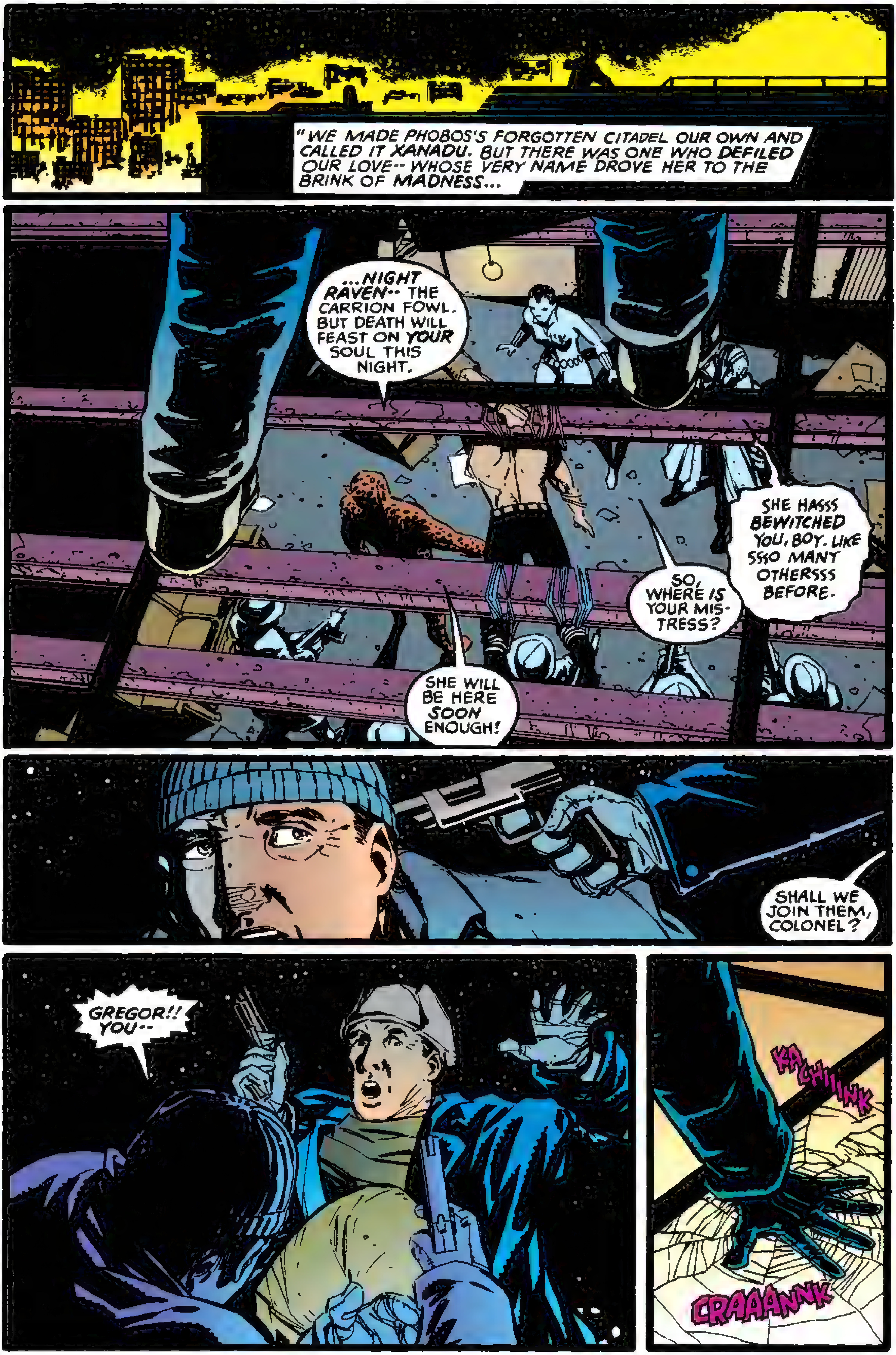
WE MEET *AGAIN*.
AND YOU'RE NOT COLD SHOULDERING ME *THIS* TIME.
STRONG, SILENT, SHOT-UP TYPE, *EH?* JUST THE WAY I *LIKE* 'EM. YOU'RE COMING WITH *ME*, HANDSOME.
NO! I WILL *HEAL* IN A FEW MINUTESSS.
LEAVE IT! I WILL REMOVE IT!
I'VE SEEN WORSE...
...BUT THAT *SMELL* --IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU GAG.
YOU'VE HAD A *HECK* OF A LIFE, BUT YOU'RE A LONG WAY FROM MEDICINE HAT, COCHISE--
HOW DID YOU...? WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF MY *LIFE*?!

"AS A CHILD, I DREAMT I WAS A RAVEN FEEDING ON THE SOULSSS OF THE DEAD, YET I WAS AMONGST THEM. GRANDFATHER SSSAID MY LIFE WOULD BE A SSSTRANGE AND TWISSSTED ONE, WITH DEATH MY CONSSSTANT COMPANION.
"AS A MAN, I FACED DEATH BESIDE THE OTHER WARRIORSSS OF THE NEW WORLD. UNTIL REALITY CRUSHED OUR HOPESSS AS EASILY AS OUR BODIESSS. I WAS LUCKY... MADNESSS CLAIMED ME BEFORE A BULLET DID.
"IN THE HOME I WAS THE BIRD-BOY, THE CRAZY HALF-BREED WHO THOUGHT HE COULD FLY. BUT THEY COULD NOT HEAR GRANDFATHER'S WORDS-- 'ALWAYS HONOR YOUR SSSPIRIT BIRD... FLY WITH DEATH BUT SSSEEK OUT TRUTH AND NURTURE IT.'
"HE WAS HALF RIGHT.
"TRUTH AND LOVE HAD LONG FLOWN FROM ME, AND THE THE ONLY THING I NURTURED WERE TWO '45S AND A QUICK BLADE-- COWBOY AND INDIAN ALL ROLLED INTO ONE... AND THEN YI YANG APPEARED.
"SHE WAS POISSSON. YET I COULDN'T SHAKE HER OR THE PAIN SHE HAD CAUSED. IT WAS ONLY WHEN I TRIED TO TAKE MY OWN LIFE AND FAILED, THAT I REALISSSED THE DEPTHSSS OF HER MALICE... AND BOREDOM.
"I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER. SHE WAS POISON, AND THE EARTH SSSPAT HER OUT, SSSCARRED AND VENGEFUL. SHE FOUND ME AGAIN, AND WE RENEWED OUR DANCE OF DEATH.
"THE WOMAN WHO COULD NEVER DIE, HAD MADE ME THE INSTRUMENT OF HER OWN DEATH, AND GIVEN ME ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD TO SAVOR THE IRONY.
"RAGE SIMMERED...
"...AND EXPLODED OVER THE SKIES OF WISSSCONSIN. BUT WHEN THE HATE HAD GONE THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT-- I WAS HOLLOWED OUT.
"SHE GAVE ME A NEW LIFE, SO THAT SSSHE COULD DESSSTROY IT AGAIN. I HAD FORGOTTEN MY OWN FEATURES... AND WHEN I REMEMBERED, I WEPT FOR THE LASSST TIME. THE MAN I ONCE WAS HAD DIED LONG AGO...
"...NOW THERE WAS ONLY THE NIGHT RAVEN."

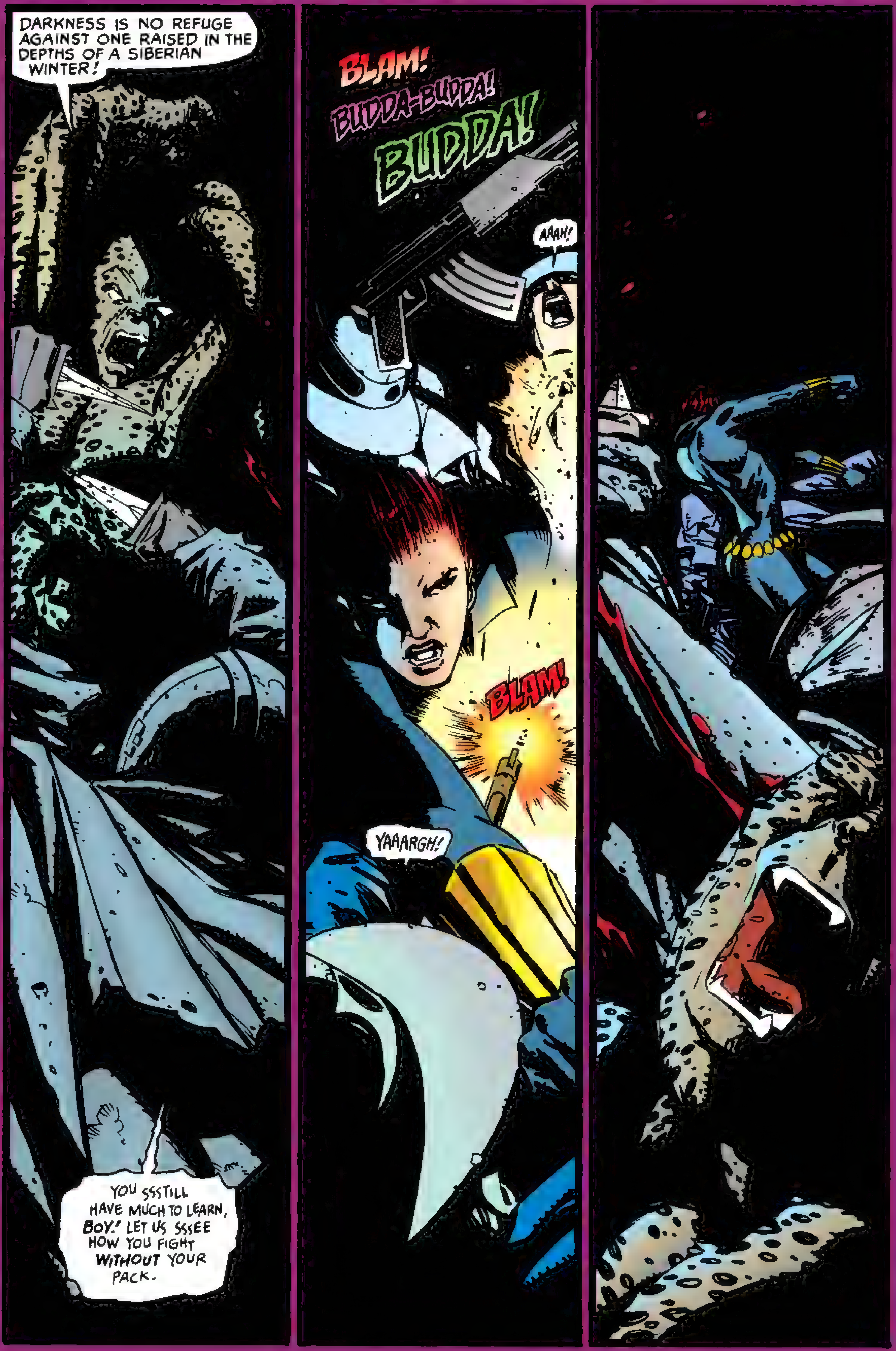

THAT BUSINESS AT THE EMBASSSY-- IT WAS YI YANG'SSS CALLING CARD. SHE COULD'T RESISSST...
...AND I DO NOT WANT TO DISSSAPOINT HER. BESIDES, YOU WANT HER TOO.
NOT YOUR WAY.
THE MOLINA MUST BE KEEPING MOSCOW'S FINEST BUSY. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.
DESSSIST. I CAN WALK FAR. WE WILL GO TO MY PLACE.
IT ISSS NOT FAR.
BUT WHY DID YI YANG KILL THAT DIPLOMAT--JUST TO DRAW YOU INTO THE OPEN? SURELY THERE WERE OTHER--
HE WAS IN THE MOB'SSS POCKETSSS, AND WANTED OUT. HE DIDN'T DIE AT THE EMBASSSY, HE WAS DUMPED THERE LATER.
TO THROW US OFF THE SCENT... PARDON THE EXPRESSION. BUT THE CORONER?
ISS MISSSSING!
YOU KNOW SHE'S USING YOU AGAIN, WHY LET HER? IF I WAS IMMORTAL, I COULD THINK OF BETTER THINGS TO DO WITH MY LIFE.
THISSS ISSS MY LIFE. IT ISS ALL I KNOW.
SO, THIS IS YOUR LITTLE NEST! BUT WHO'S THAT OVER--
YOU?! HOW...?!

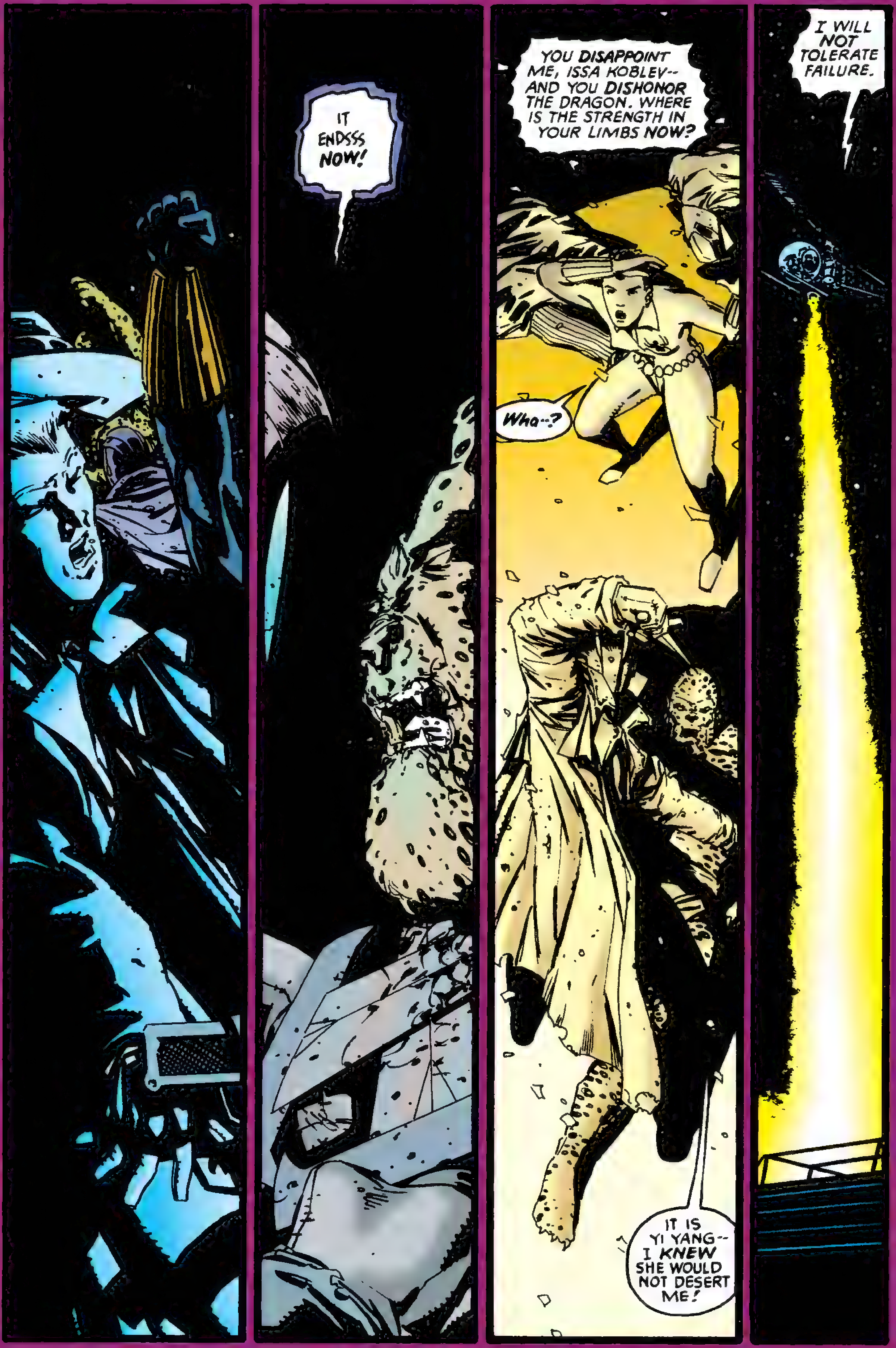
HIYA, TASH! SEE YOU CAUGHT UP WITH OUR UGLY DUCKLING.
IVAN! HOW-- *WHO* DID THIS TO YOU?!
SORRY, BEAUTIFUL, I DIDN'T GET HIS PLATES, BUT I *HAVE* GOT THE MOTHER OF ALL HANGOVERS... WHERE AM I?
YOU'RE IN MOTHER RUSSIA, BIG GUY. I'LL--
YOU'LL JOIN HIM IN *HELL*, NATASHA ROMANOFF.
WHO?!

ONCE I WAS ISSA KOBLEV, NOW I AM THE *SNOW LEOPARD.*
ONCE I WAS A WARD OF THE SOVIET STATE, CHOSEN TO SERVE AS A SUPER SOLDIER. BUT WHEN PHOBOS WAS DRIVEN FROM THE SCHOOL, THE PROJECT WAS ABANDONED ...ALONG WITH MANY OF MY KIND...
...LEFT TO *ROT* IN THE RADIOACTIVE ZONE...
"...BECAUSE THEY FEARED US.
"BUT I LEARNED TO TRUST THE ANIMAL WITHIN...
"...AS WELL AS THE MAN.
"YI YANG SAW ALL THIS AND MORE, AND BECAME MY TEACHER...
"...AND LOVER.

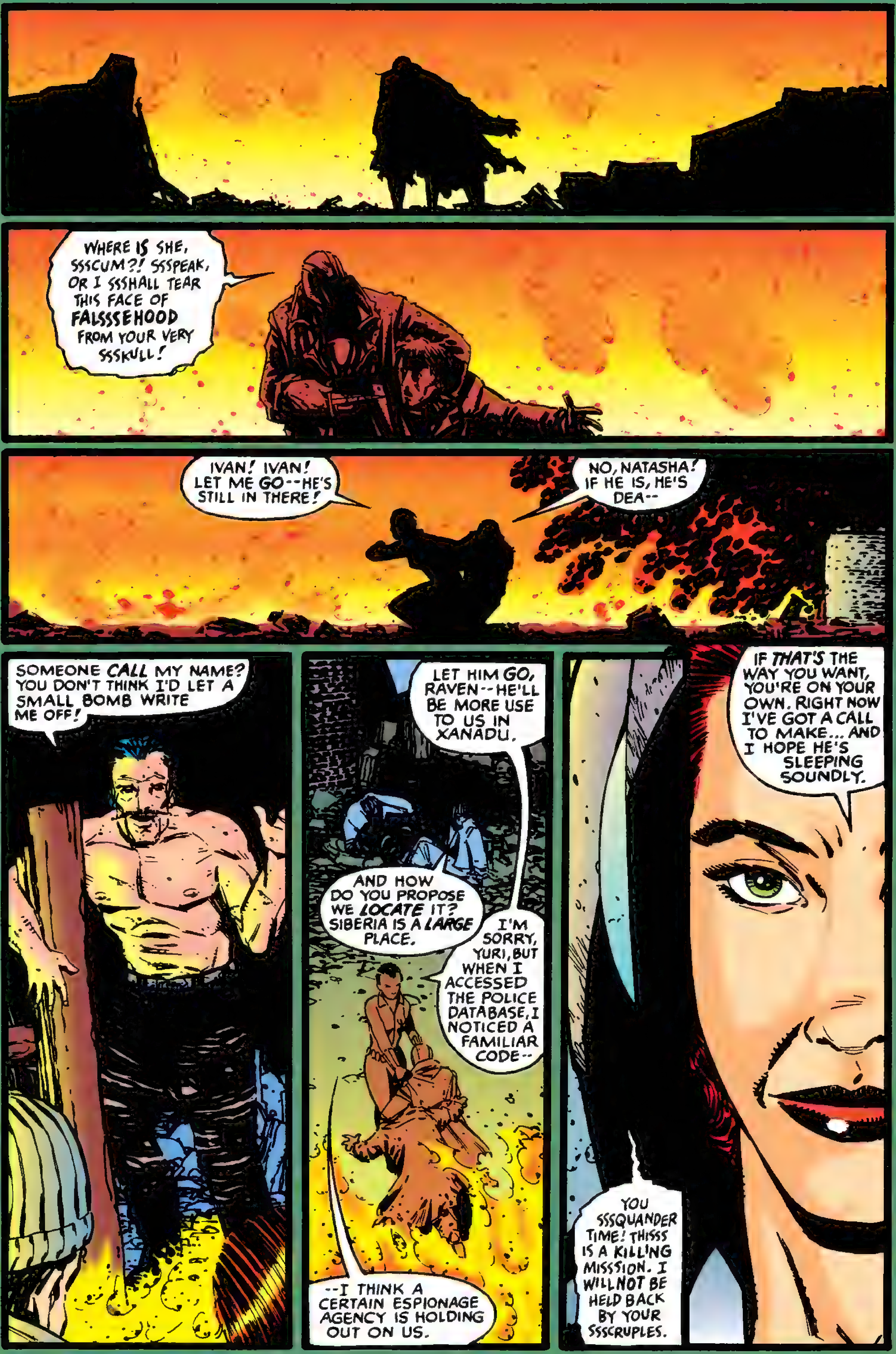

"WE MADE PHOBOS'S FORGOTTEN CITADEL OUR OWN AND CALLED IT XANADU. BUT THERE WAS ONE WHO DEFILED OUR LOVE-- WHOSE VERY NAME DROVE HER TO THE BRINK OF MADNESS...
...NIGHT RAVEN-- THE CARRION FOWL. BUT DEATH WILL FEAST ON YOUR SOUL THIS NIGHT.
SHE HASSS BEWITCHED YOU, BOY. LIKE SSSO MANY OTHERSSS BEFORE.
SO, WHERE IS YOUR MISTRESS?
SHE WILL BE HERE SOON ENOUGH!
SHALL WE JOIN THEM, COLONEL?
GREGOR!! YOU--
KA-CHIIINK
CRAAANNK

WHAT WAS *YOUR* PRICE, GREGOR?! HOW MUCH IS BETRAYAL WORTH ON THE OPEN MARKET *THESE* DAYS?
SAVE YOUR SPEECHES, COLONEL THIS IS *NOT* FOR MONEY, THIS IS FOR OUR FORMER HOMELAND -- NOT THE INTERNATIONAL *BEGGAR* WE HAVE BECOME. YI YANG SHARES THE VISION OF THOSE WHO WISH TO MAKE RUSSIA *GREAT* AGAIN!
Pah! YOU ARE A GREATER FOOL THAN I THOUGHT!
ENOUGH! DO NOT TEST MY PATIENCE, COMRADE! YOU ARE PAID WELL ENOUGH FOR YOUR TREACHERY!
KILL HIM!
P'CHIINK
AND YOU, BOY? WHAT HASSS THE CHINESE WHORE PROMISED YOU FOR YOUR SSERVICESSS-- ETERNAL BLISSSS?


DARKNESS IS NO REFUGE AGAINST ONE RAISED IN THE DEPTHS OF A SIBERIAN WINTER!
YOU SSSTILL HAVE MUCH TO LEARN, BOY! LET US SSSEE HOW YOU FIGHT WITHOUT YOUR PACK.
BLAM!
BUDDA-BUDDA!
BUDDA!
AAAH!
BLAM!
YAAARGH!

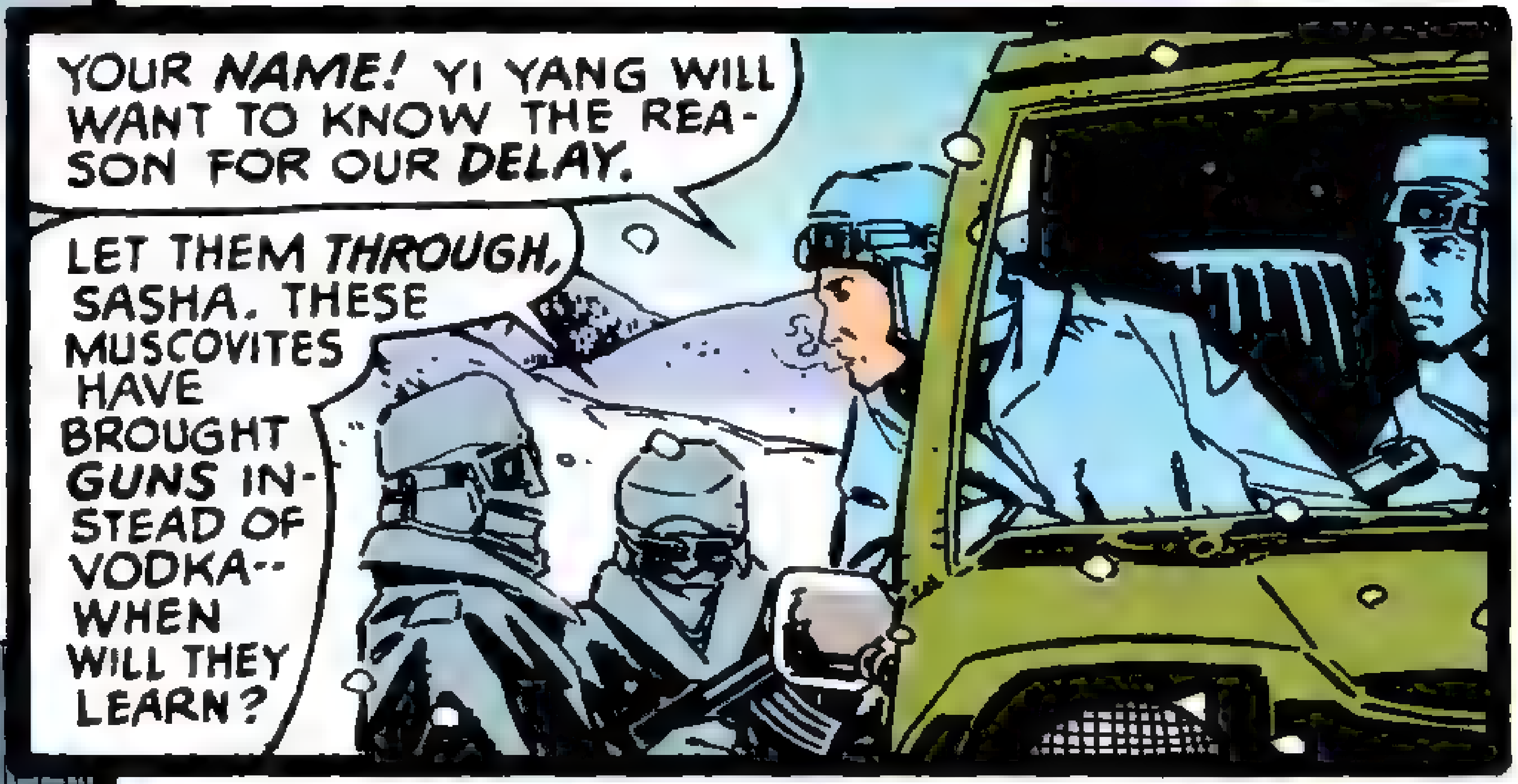

IT ENDSSS NOW!
YOU DISAPPOINT ME, ISSA KOBLEV-- AND YOU DISHONOR THE DRAGON. WHERE IS THE STRENGTH IN YOUR LIMBS NOW?
Wha--?
IT IS YI YANG-- I KNEW SHE WOULD NOT DESERT ME!
I WILL NOT TOLERATE FAILURE.

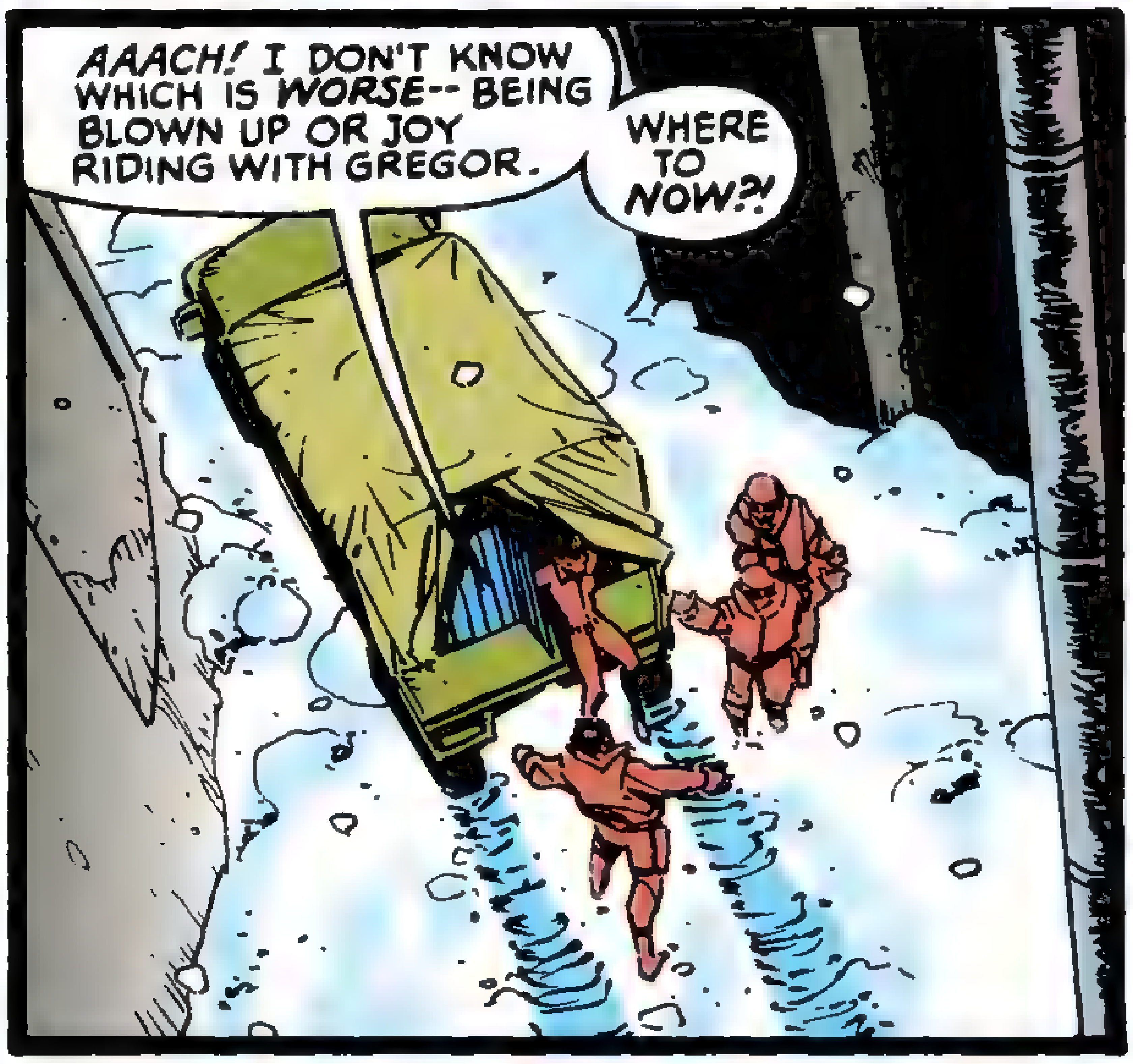
YI YAAANG! NO! DO NOT LEAVE ME! I WILL DEFEAT THE DEMON!
YOU ARE ALREADY DEAD, BOY. LET ME END IT SSSWIFTLY.
AND YOU, MY DEATH BIRD, SHALL WE SEE IF YOU CAN SURVIVE THE BREATH OF THE DRAGON?
GET OUT! GET OUT, NOW!
KABOOOM!

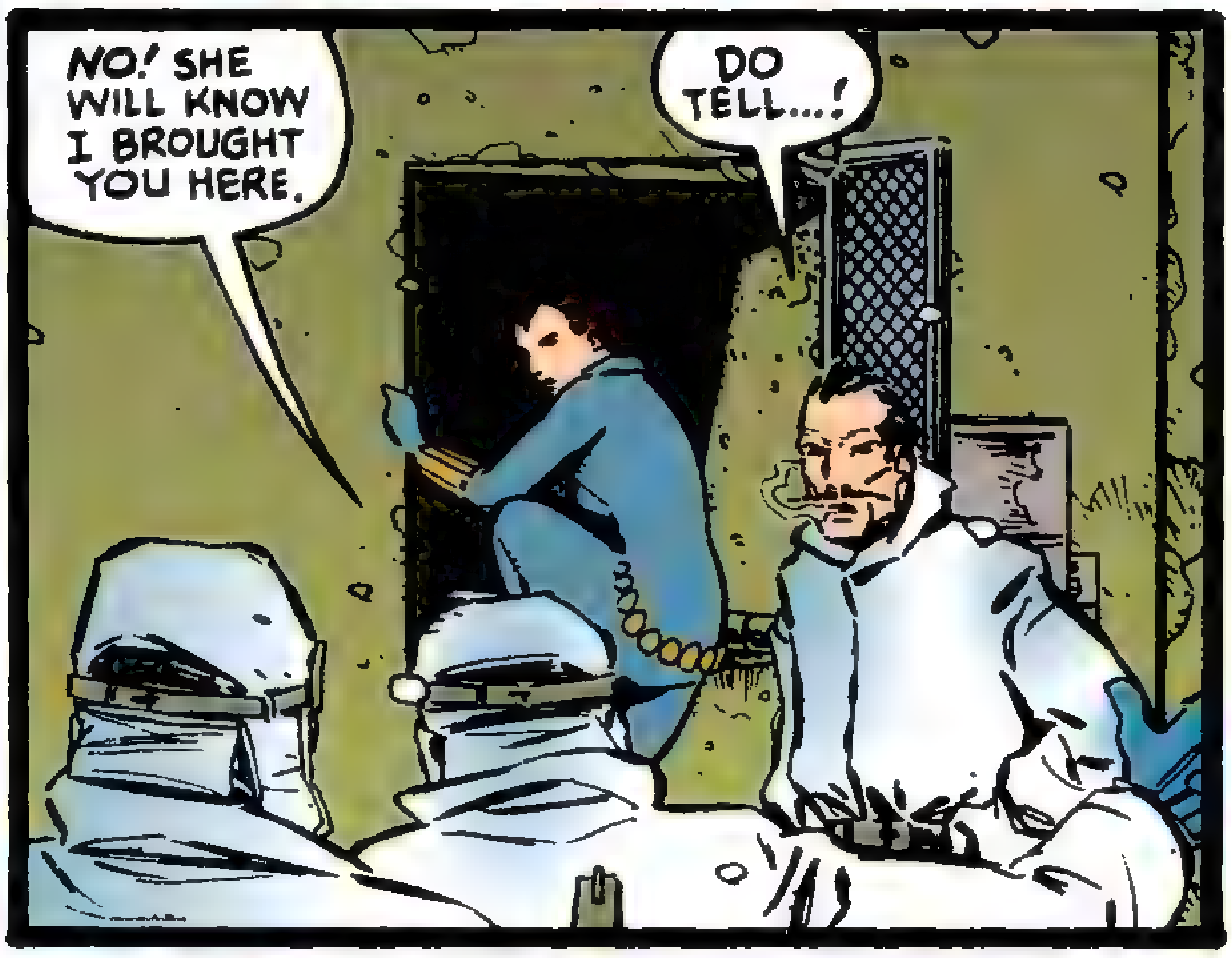

WHERE IS SHE, SSSCUM?! SSSPEAK, OR I SSSHALL TEAR THIS FACE OF FALSSSEHOOD FROM YOUR VERY SSSKULL!
IVAN! IVAN! LET ME GO--HE'S STILL IN THERE!
NO, NATASHA! IF HE IS, HE'S DEA--
SOMEONE CALL MY NAME? YOU DON'T THINK I'D LET A SMALL BOMB WRITE ME OFF!
LET HIM GO, RAVEN--HE'LL BE MORE USE TO US IN XANADU.
AND HOW DO YOU PROPOSE WE LOCATE IT? SIBERIA IS A LARGE PLACE.
I'M SORRY, YURI, BUT WHEN I ACCESSED THE POLICE DATABASE, I NOTICED A FAMILIAR CODE--
--I THINK A CERTAIN ESPIONAGE AGENCY IS HOLDING OUT ON US.
IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU WANT, YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN. RIGHT NOW I'VE GOT A CALL TO MAKE... AND I HOPE HE'S SLEEPING SOUNDLY.
YOU SSSQUANDER TIME! THISSS IS A KILLING MISSSION. I WILL NOT BE HELD BACK BY YOUR SSSCRUPLES.

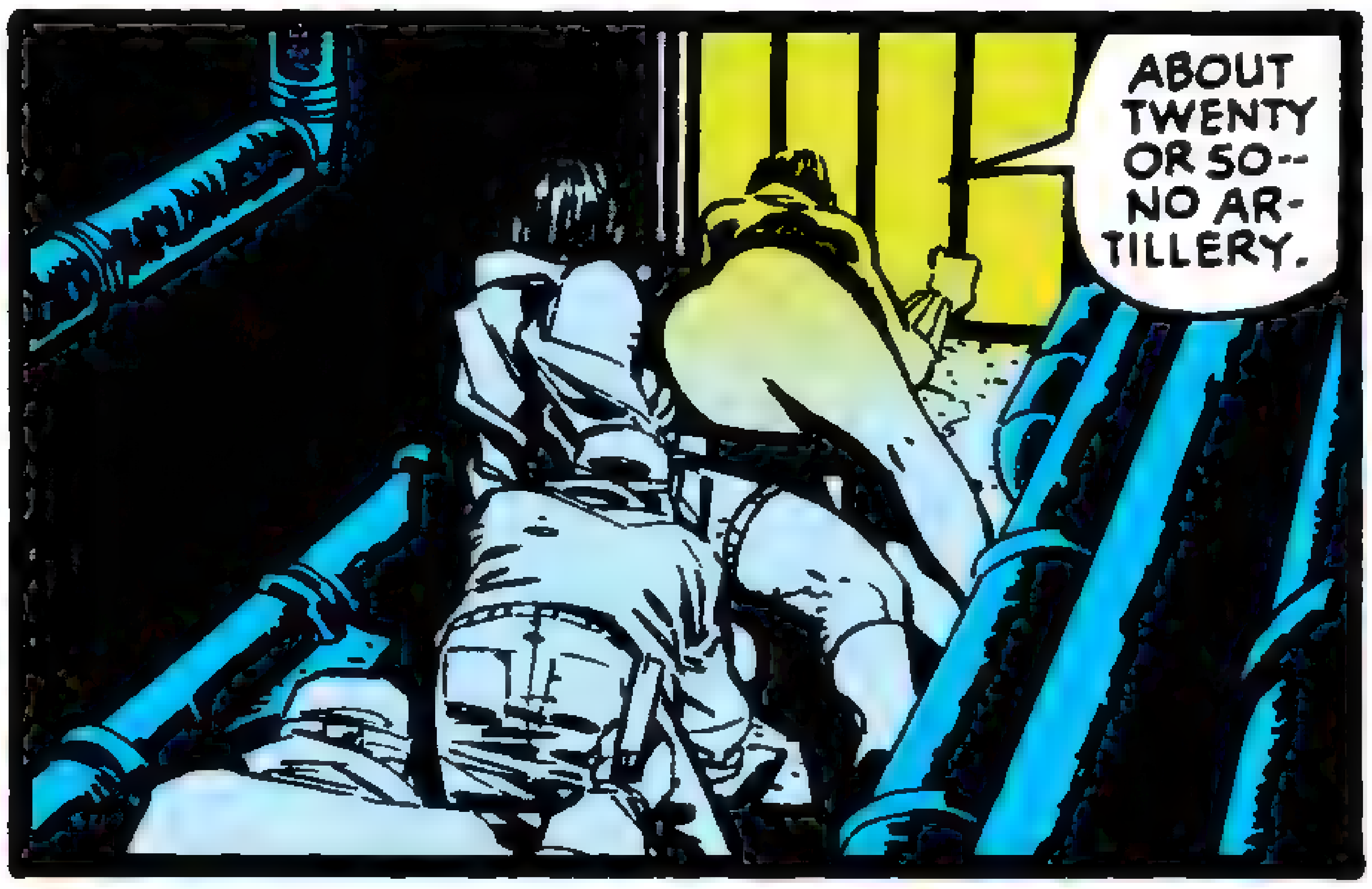
"IT SEEMED LIKE FOREVER...
"...THEN THE STORM BROKE.
"NO, NOT A STORM...
"...A SIGN."
AND THE SIX-THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD WOMAN AWOKE.

XANADU, THE FROZEN HEART OF SIBERIA.
AT SEVENTY BELOW FREEZING GLASS SHATTERS. WHEN IT'S THIS COLD, BREATH FREEZES INSTANTLY AND FALLS TO THE GROUND IN A TINKLING OF SOUNDS THAT THE LOCALS CALL THE WHISPER OF THE STARS.
THE STARS HAD PLENTY TO SAY WHEN PROFESSOR PIOTR PHOBOS SET UP HIS SCHOOL FOR SUPER SOLDIERS HERE. BUT WHEN HE WAS DRIVEN OUT, HIS PUPILS SCATTERED... AND THE ELEMENTS SWIFTLY RECLAIMED HIS DREAM.
UNTIL ANOTHER LAY SILENT SIEGE TO NATURE'S STRONGHOLD, AND MADE IT HER WINTER PALACE.
AND ONCE MORE THE BARBARIANS ARE AT THE GATE.

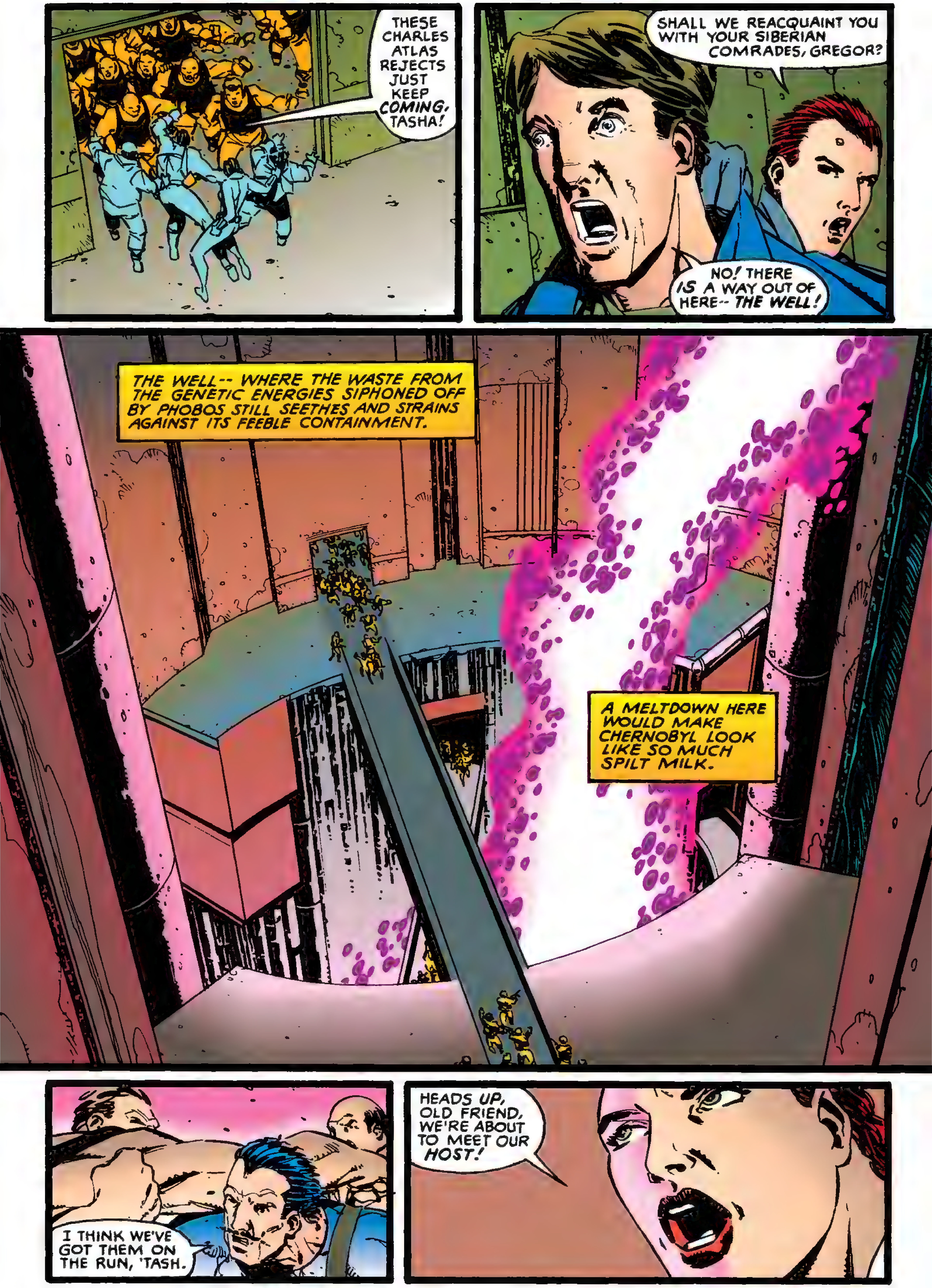

YOUR *NAME!* YI YANG WILL WANT TO KNOW THE REASON FOR OUR *DELAY.*
LET THEM *THROUGH,* SASHA. THESE MUSCOVITES HAVE BROUGHT *GUNS* INSTEAD OF VODKA-- WHEN WILL THEY LEARN?


AAACH! I DON'T KNOW WHICH IS *WORSE*-- BEING BLOWN UP OR JOY RIDING WITH GREGOR.
WHERE TO *NOW?!*

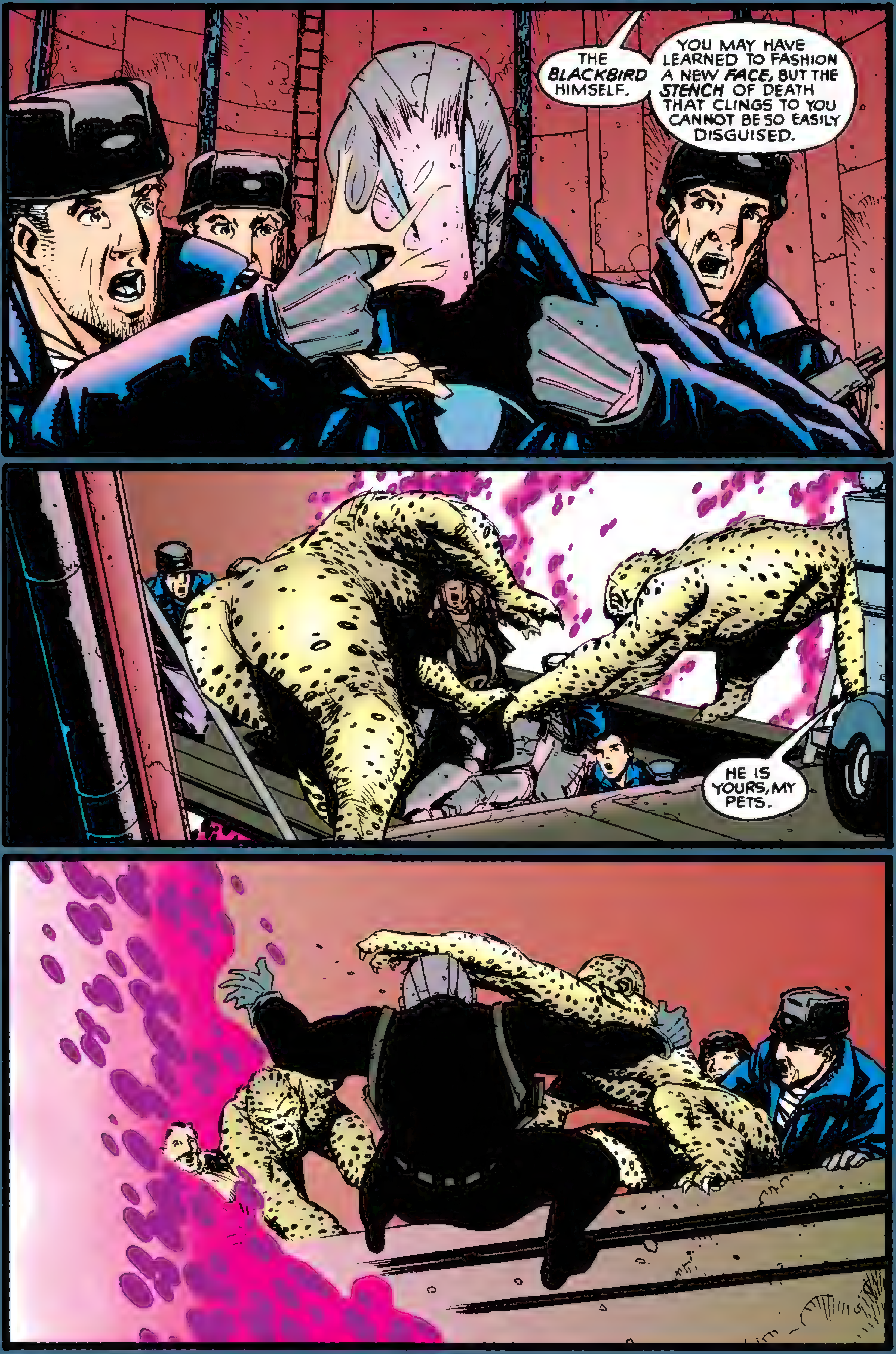

NO! SHE WILL KNOW I BROUGHT YOU HERE.
DO TELL...!

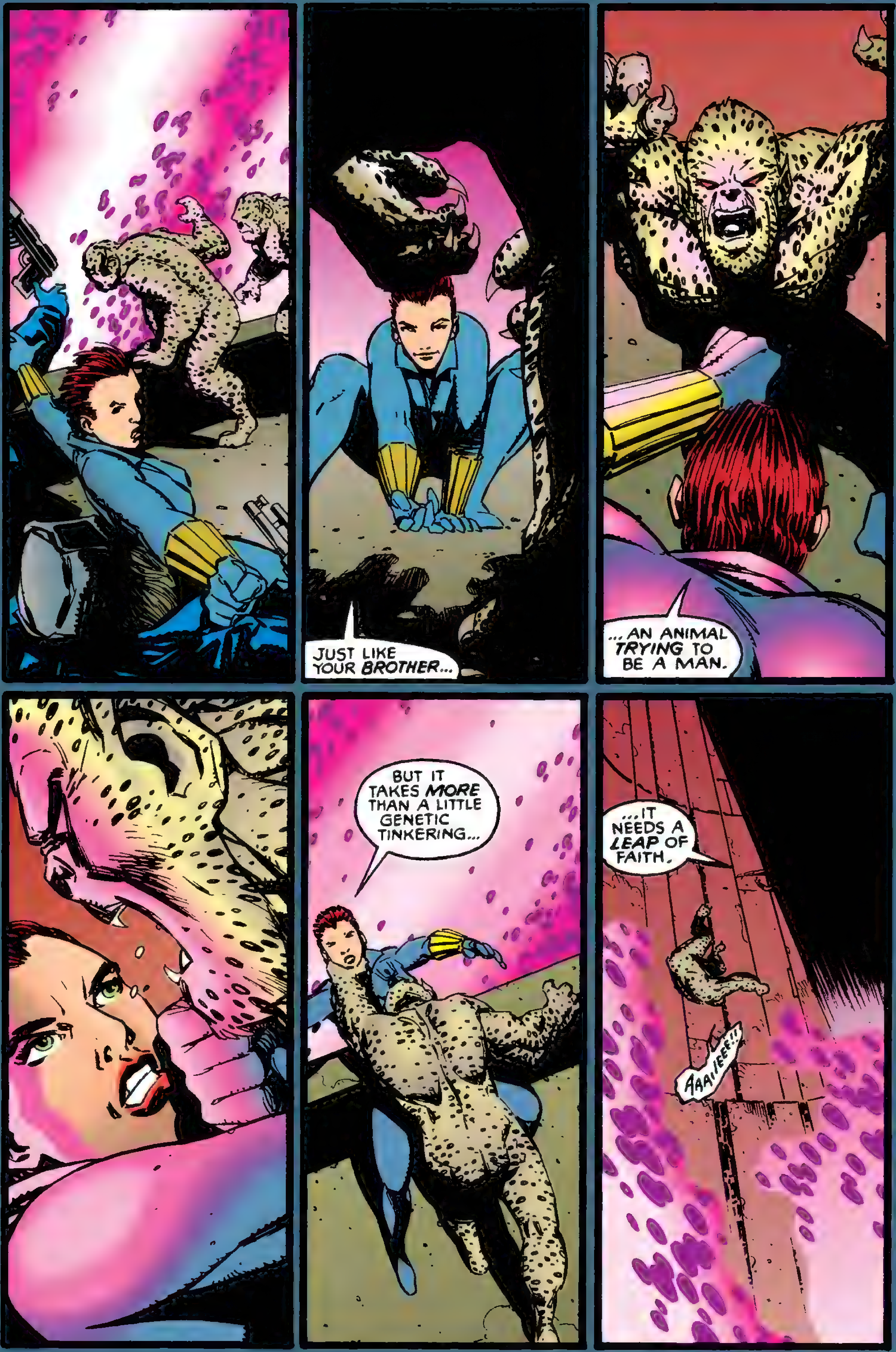

ABOUT TWENTY OR SO-- NO ARTILLERY.

LET'S MOVE!
GOING SOMEWHERE, GREGOR?

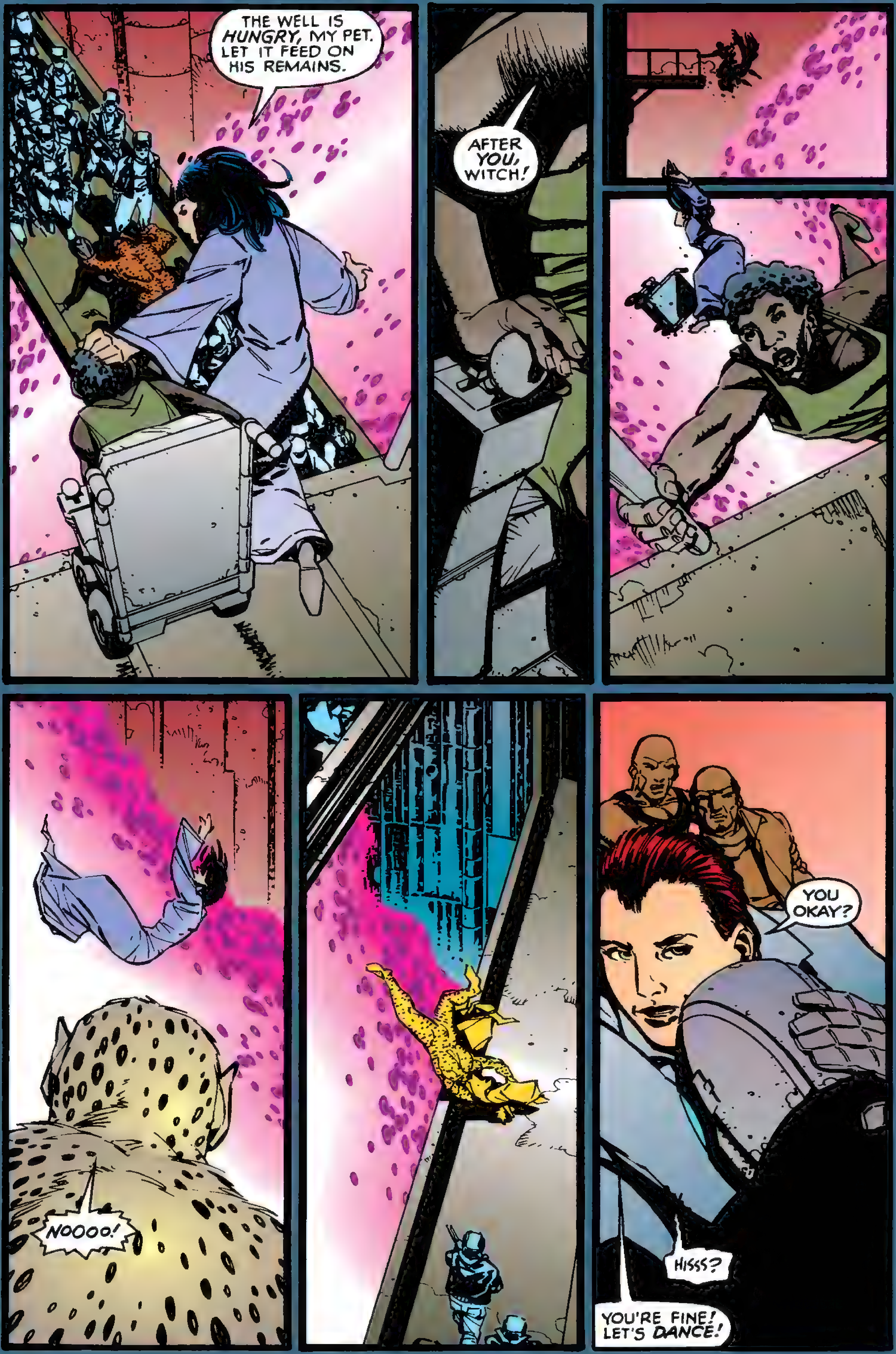

THESE CHARLES ATLAS REJECTS JUST KEEP COMING, TASHA!
SHALL WE REACQUAINT YOU WITH YOUR SIBERIAN COMRADES, GREGOR?
NO! THERE IS A WAY OUT OF HERE-- THE WELL!
THE WELL-- WHERE THE WASTE FROM THE GENETIC ENERGIES SIPHONED OFF BY PHOBOS STILL SEETHES AND STRAINS AGAINST ITS FEEBLE CONTAINMENT.
A MELTDOWN HERE WOULD MAKE CHERNOBYL LOOK LIKE SO MUCH SPILT MILK.
I THINK WE'VE GOT THEM ON THE RUN, 'TASH.
HEADS UP, OLD FRIEND, WE'RE ABOUT TO MEET OUR HOST!

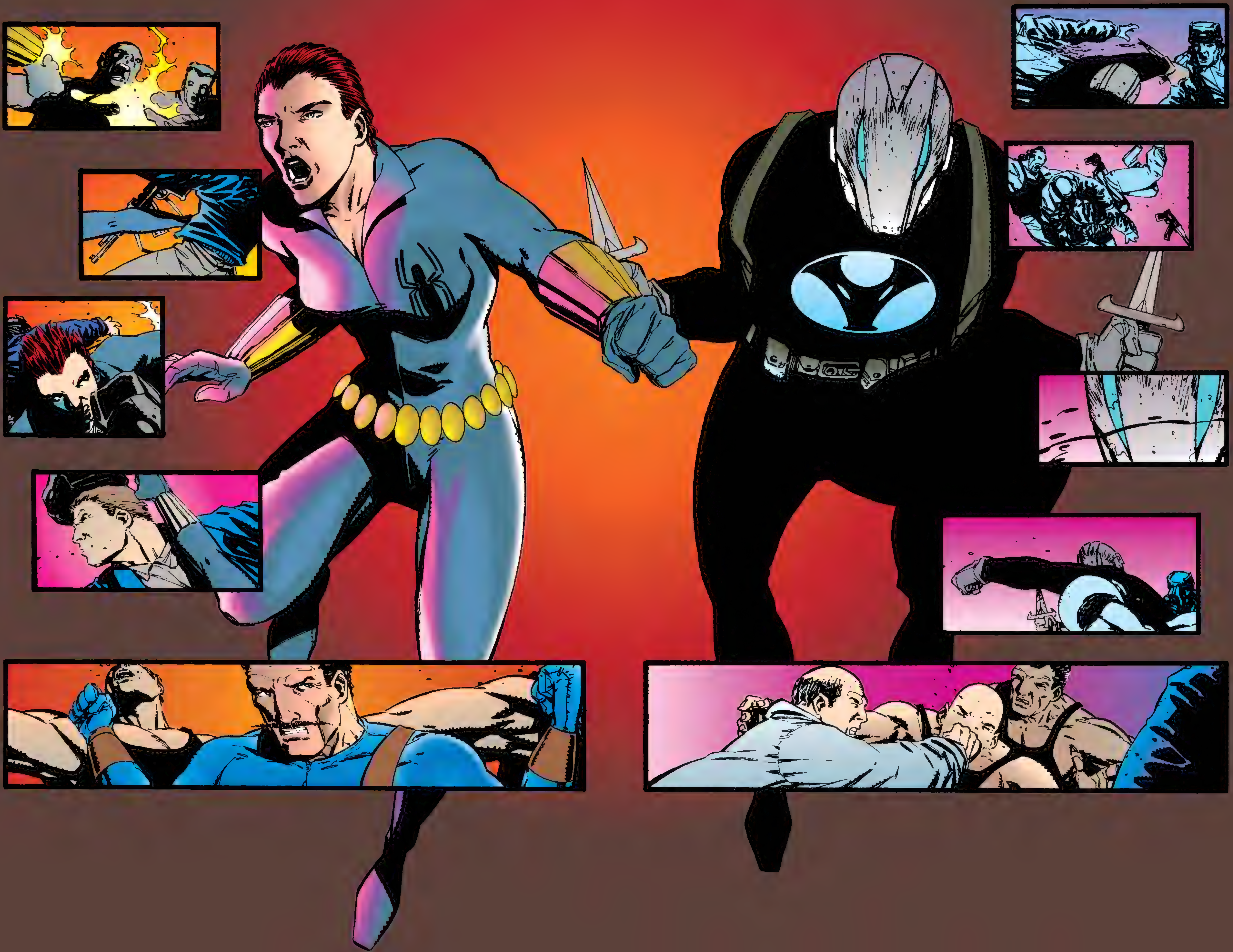
WELCOME TO XANADU. I AM YI YANG, AND AS YOU CAN SEE, ISSA KOBLEV WAS *NOT* AN ONLY CHILD.
AND *YOU*, SO MUCH EFFORT AND INTERNATIONAL GOODWILL FOR TWO VENAL POLITICIANS.
TWO?
THAT *CRAVEN* IMBECILE KOSTOEV HAD A REGRETTABLE ATTACK OF NERVES, SO WE INDUCED A MORE *FATAL* CONDITION IN THE GROUNDS OF THE EMBASSY-- WITH THE HELP OF A COMRADE IN THE AMERICAN OFFICE.
YOU THREE, *HOWEVER*, SHOW ADMIRABLE RESILIENCE. A SHAME THAT MY BIRD OF PREY COULD NOT ALSO GRACE US WITH *HIS* PRESENCE.
THOUGH I IMAGINE HE *WILL* FIND HIS WAY HERE...
...EVEN *WITHOUT* THIS TOAD'S HELP.
THEY *FORCED* ME! YOU *PROMISED*--
"I LIED."
WHAT IS IT, MY BEAUTY? IS SOMETHING *TROUBLING* YOU?
IT IS NOT OUR GUESTS THOUGH, IS IT? BUT ONE WHO *GUARDS* THEM...

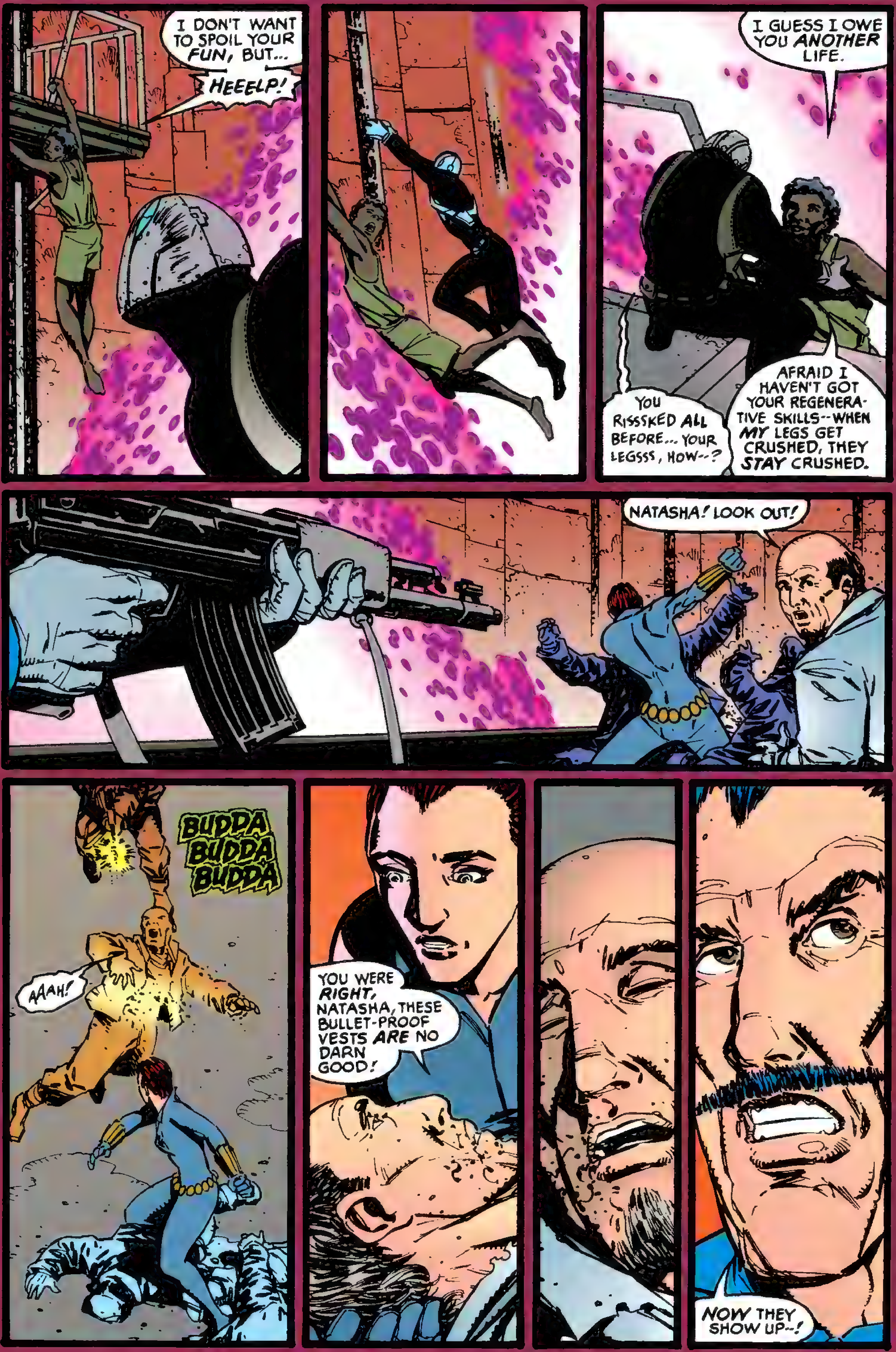

THE *BLACKBIRD* HIMSELF.
YOU MAY HAVE LEARNED TO FASHION A NEW *FACE*, BUT THE *STENCH* OF DEATH THAT CLINGS TO YOU CANNOT BE SO EASILY DISGUISED.
HE IS YOURS, MY PETS.


JUST LIKE YOUR *BROTHER*...
...AN ANIMAL *TRYING* TO BE A MAN.
BUT IT TAKES *MORE* THAN A LITTLE GENETIC TINKERING...
...IT NEEDS A *LEAP* OF FAITH.
AAAIIEE!!

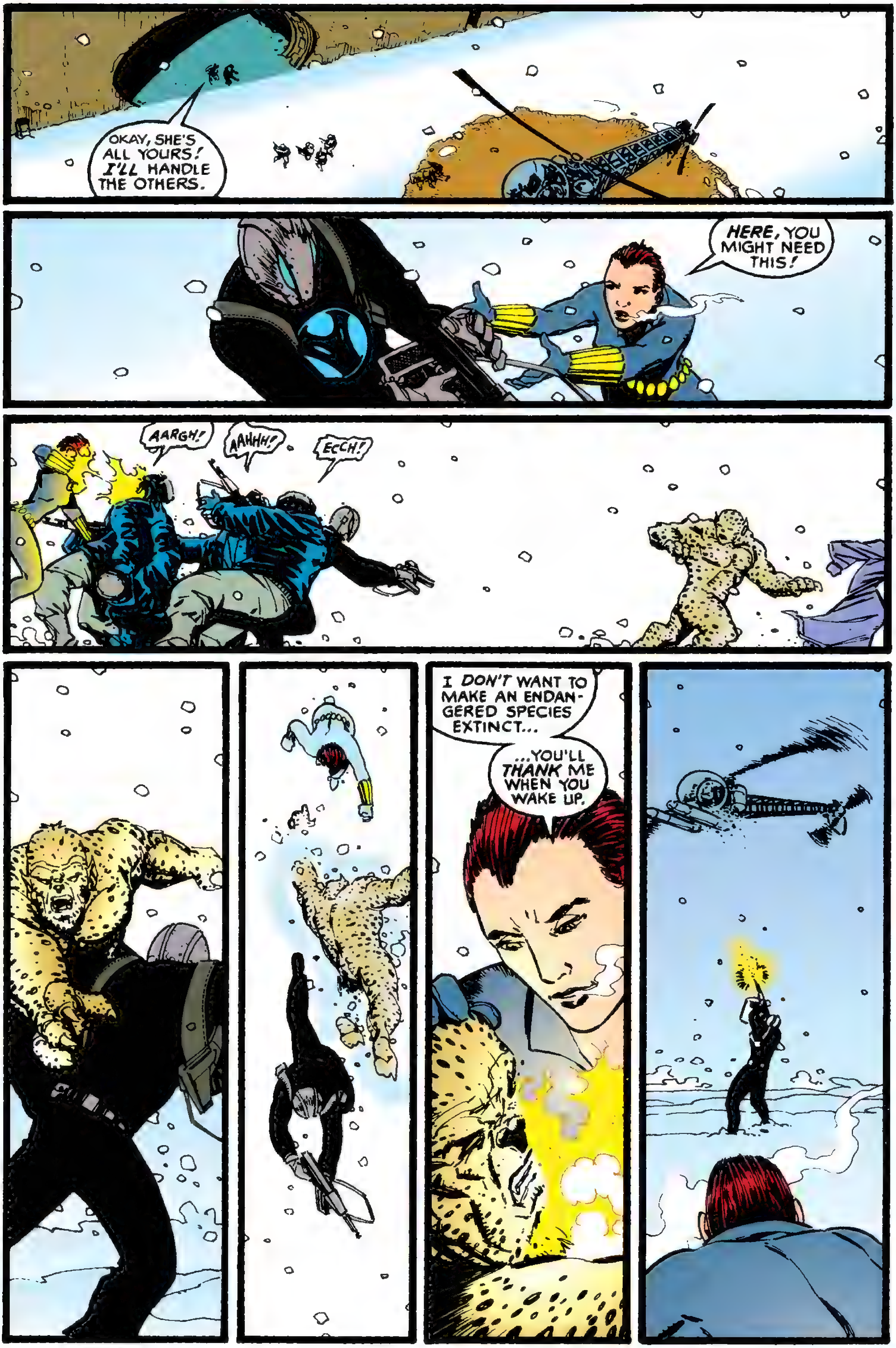
YOU SSSEE, KILLING IS EASSSY WHEN YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO IT.
EASIER THAN YOU *THINK*, MY PIGEON. DROP YOUR GUNS OR WE SHALL SEE WHETHER THE CRIPPLE CAN FLY.
NO! *DON'T* FALL FOR IT!
AAAH!
LET US SEE HOW YOUR MUCH-VAUNTED IMMORTALITY COPES WITHOUT A *HEAD*...


THE WELL IS *HUNGRY*, MY PET. LET IT FEED ON HIS REMAINS.
AFTER *YOU*, WITCH!
NOOOO!
YOU OKAY?
HISSS?
YOU'RE FINE! LET'S *DANCE*!




I DON'T WANT TO SPOIL YOUR FUN, BUT...
HEEELP!
I GUESS I OWE YOU ANOTHER LIFE.
YOU RISSSKED ALL BEFORE... YOUR LEGSSS, HOW--?
AFRAID I HAVEN'T GOT YOUR REGENERATIVE SKILLS--WHEN MY LEGS GET CRUSHED, THEY STAY CRUSHED.
NATASHA! LOOK OUT!
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
AAAH!
YOU WERE RIGHT, NATASHA, THESE BULLET-PROOF VESTS ARE NO DARN GOOD!
NOW THEY SHOW UP--!

... OUR BOYS IN BLUE!
WHERE'S OUR *TURKEY?* HE'S MISSING HIS THANKSGIVING.
UP THERE--!
SORRY, NICK, GOT TO GO!
WHAT'S WITH THE *SHOOTER*, TASH? IT'S NOT YOUR STYLE!
IT'S FOR YURI...
YOU'RE NOT RUSHING OFF *WITHOUT* SAYING GOODBYE?
GOODBYE!


OKAY, SHE'S ALL YOURS! *I'LL* HANDLE THE OTHERS.
HERE, YOU MIGHT NEED THIS!
AARGH!
AAHHH!
ECCH!
I *DON'T* WANT TO MAKE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES EXTINCT...
...YOU'LL *THANK* ME WHEN YOU WAKE UP.

BUDDA!
BUDDA!
BUDDA!
BUDDDA!
BUDDDA!
BUDDA!
KALABLOOOM!

NO SIGN OF THEM. *NOT* THAT I'M SURPRISED. THOSE TWO WILL PROBABLY BE AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS AFTER *HADES* FREEZES OVER.
YURI'LL GET A STATE FUNERAL. SHAME, HE SEEMED LIKE *A GOOD MAN.*
HE WAS... I'LL MISS HIM.
ANGELA'S SAFE, AND I THINK THAT BIG LUG, IVAN'S DOWNING THE *REST* OF THE DRAGON DAME'S SUPPLY OF PEPPER VODKA.
Brrr! I *DON'T* BLAME HIM. IT'S COLDER'N A WIDOW'S SHOULDER OUT HERE.
WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO *SAY,* NICK? *THANKS* FOR DROPPING BY?!
I'M *TOO* OLD FOR THESE GAMES, 'TASH. YOU *KNOW* THE SCORE--WE HAD TO PLUG THE EMBASSY LEAK...
...AND WE'VE PUT THE *KIBOSH* ON THE CHINA GAL'S DRUG EMPORIUM THANKS TO YOU.
I... I'M *SORRY,* NICK. IT'S JUST THAT THE NEW RUSSIA'S *NOT* WHAT I EXPECTED.
I *LEFT* BECAUSE THE SYSTEM WAS DESTROYING THE COUNTRY. NOW THE SYSTEM'S GONE, I'M NOT SURE IT'S FOR THE BEST-- I'M *STILL* A STRANGER HERE.
GIVE IT TIME, 'TASH.
AT LEAST YOU'VE GOT *A CHOICE...*
"...WHICH IS *MORE* THAN WE CAN SAY FOR OUR *FROZEN* FRIEND DOWN THERE...
"...BYE, BYE, BLACKBIRD."
THE END

The new Russia: murder, extortion, corruption; sounds just like the ol' U.S.A.. And when a diplomat is found murdered on the grounds of the United States Embassy, Nick Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. are drawn into an international crisis that pits secret agents against Russian Mafioso.

Into this seething cauldron enters The Black Widow, full-time Avenger as well as Russia's most famous expatriate, and Night Raven, the angel of death and destruction. His bloody one-man war against crime is just a pastime; his real obsession is to kill one person, Yi Yang, the woman who made him immortal.

A modern, fast-paced thriller that will dazzle and delight you, told in hard-edged, dark, somber style by Cefn Ridout and Charlie Adlard.

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JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY™
FEATURING: THE BLACK WIDOW™
LOBDELL
GREENE
KETCHAM
WEB OF INTRIGUE!

THE *TRUTH?*
YOU WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT *WHAT HAPPENED?*
I DON'T KNOW THAT I CAN *DO* THAT.
I DON'T KNOW THAT THERE *IS* A TRUTH.
BUT, I *CAN* TELL YOU WHAT I *KNOW*...

THOUGH, TO BE *HONEST,* I DON'T KNOW WHY *ANYONE* WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THE *RAMBLINGS* OF AN *ADDLE-MINDED* OLD WOMAN.
MY *SUPERIORS* IN *WASHINGTON* DON'T SEE IT THAT WAY, *Mrs. HEDERMAN.*
ACCORDING TO THE *PUBLISHED ACCOUNTS,* YOU'RE THE *ONLY* WITNESS TO... THE *INCIDENT.*
THAT MAKES YOUR *RECOLLECTIONS* VALUABLE TO THE *RESOLUTION* OF THIS CASE.
THAT IS *KIND* OF YOU TO SAY, *AGENT TENKO.*
IT'S... *NICE* TO FEEL IMPORTANT.
BELIEVE ME-- THEY WOULDN'T HAVE SENT ME ALL THE WAY HERE TO *PORTLAND, MAINE* IN THE DEAD OF WINTER, IF THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE YOU MAY HOLD THE *KEY* TO--
WHEEEEEEEEE
I *LOVE* THAT SOUND.
IT MEANS THE *HOT WATER* IS READY FOR THE *TEA.*
TEA IS *LIFE,* AGENT TENKO.
MAY I *POUR* YOU A CUP?
WHEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
THANK YOU, MRS. HED--
LOTTIE, PLEASE.
Mrs. HEDERMAN WAS MY *MOTHER.*

THESE PEOPLE...
...HAS THE *FBI ARRESTED* THEM ALL?
YES.
MOST OF THEM.
ALL BUT *ONE*, ACTUALLY.
THE *WOMAN*.
BUT IF YOU'RE *WORRIED* ABOUT THE SAFETY OF YOU AND YOUR *SON*, LET ME *REASSURE* YOU THAT THE *BUREAU*...
MY PARENTS *DIED* IN *NAZI GERMANY*, AGENT TENKO.
DEAD, BECAUSE AN *ENTIRE WORLD* TURNED ITS BACK ON A HANDFUL OF *VERY EVIL* PEOPLE.
I AM NOT AFRAID ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I *TESTIFY*.
RATHER, I AM AFRAID ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN... IF I *DON'T*.
IS *CHAMOMILE* ALL RIGHT?
PERFECT, THANK YOU.
I SUPPOSE I SHOULD *BEGIN* AT THE *BEGINNING*...

"...IT SEEMS *IMPOSSIBLE* THAT IT WAS ONLY A *WEEK* AGO.
"EVEN MORE... *'OBSCENE'* IS THE ONLY WORD I CAN THINK OF... THAT IT HAPPENED *HERE* IN THE *MIDDLE* OF *NOWHERE*.
"IT WAS *TUESDAY*.
"THE *FIRST TRUST NATIONAL BANK* WHERE I HAD BANKED FOR THE PAST *THIRTEEN YEARS*.
MORE TIME?!
WE ASKED FOR A *VAN* WITH A FULL GAS TANK, AND YOU PEOPLE ARE CARRYING ON LIKE YOU'RE TRYING TO *REINVENT* THE *WHEEL!*
WELL *HERE'S* MY DILEMMA, OFFICER: I ONLY GOT *SEVEN* HOSTAGES.
AND *SEEING* AS I PLAN ON *KILLING ONE* EVERY *FIVE MINUTES* THAT I *DON'T* GET WHAT I WANT--
P-Please, n-no...
--I FIGURE I'M GOING TO *RUN OUT OF HOSTAGES* BEFORE YOU BRING ME THE *VAN!*
"*POOR* GIRL.
"*NANCY RUSHMAN* WAS HER NAME.
"A *NEW TELLER*, SHE'D ONLY BEEN THERE *TWO* WEEKS.
"SHE WAS *TERRIFIED*.
THIRTY SECONDS, *eh?*
OUT *FRONT?*
SOMEHOW I *KNEW* YOU'D SEE IT *MY WAY*, OFFICER.
Wow.
YOU'RE *GOOD* AT THAT, *DUDE*.
"WAS *I* SCARED?
"A *LITTLE*, PERHAPS.
"BUT I'M *OLD*.
"I'VE *LIVED* MY LIFE.

SCREECH
PERFECT.
LOAD THE MONEY FIRST.
THEN THE HOSTAGES.
P-Please, no...
"THEY HAD IT VERY WELL PLANNED.
"RIGHT DOWN TO ME.
"I WAS THE 'S' IN HOSTAGES.
THEY'RE GETTING AWAY.
I DON'T LIKE THIS, MATT.
YEAH, WELL, YOU'D LIKE SEVEN INNOCENT DEAD PEOPLE EVEN LESS.
C'MON! C'MON!
ANYONE FOLLOWS-- THE GIRLS BUY IT!
GOT IT?!
YOU'LL RELEASE THEM AT THE COUNTY BORDER --LIKE YOU PROMISED?
PROBABLY.
VRRRROOOOOM!

WE DID IT.
WE REALLY DID IT.
OF COURSE, WE DID.
SHE PLANNED EVERY DETAIL DOWN TO THE WIRE:
HIT A BIG BANK IN A SMALL CITY.
MORNING, WHEN EVERYONE BUT US ARE BLEARY EYED.
BUT JUST AFTER THE MORNING RUSH HOUR SO WE DON'T GET CAUGHT IN TRAFFIC.
I GUESS EBON FLAME IS AS SMART AS THEY SAY.
YOU EVER MEET HER?
NO ONE'S EVER MET HER.
THAT I KNOW OF.
YEEE-HAAAAAW!
THIS SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO FUND THE REVOLUTION FOR MONTHS!
AND THAT'S NOT EVEN THE BEST OF IT!
RIGHT ABOUT NOW, THOSE COPS ARE IN THERE RESCUING THE OTHERS-- SCOURING FOR CLUES.
AREN'T THEY GOING TO BE SURPRISED WHEN THE EXPLOSIVES WE PLANTED IN THE VAULT WIND UP BRINGING THE WHOLE BUILDING DOWN AROUND THEM!
WHAT
DID
YOU
SAY?!

SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEECH!
BUDDA! BUDDA! BUDDA!
NOW WHAT?
BRZZATT
WHAM
Woulphn!
Urmp!
BLAM!
BLAM!
Wha--?!
WHO-- WHO ARE YOU?!

Stan Lee Presents:
JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY
Featuring THE BLACK WIDOW in
THE FIRE NEXT TIME...
By
SCOTT LOBDELL WRITER
RANDY GREEN PENCILER
RICK KETCHAM INKER
"SHE DIDN'T ANSWER HIM.
"INSTEAD SHE JUST SMILED AT HIM.
"A SMILE OF ICE.
"THE TYPE OF SMILE THAT FREEZES THE BLOOD IN YOUR VEINS.
FINE.
DON'T SAY A WORD.
IN ANOTHER THREE SECONDS IT'S NOT GOING TO MATTER--
BUDDA! BUDDA!
--'CAUSE YOU'LL BE DEAD!
BUDDA! BUDDA!
With
JON BABCOCK: LETTERER
STEVE OLIFF: COLORIST
JOE ANDREANI: EDITOR
BOB HARRAS: EDITOR IN CHIEF

"I RECOGNIZED HER, OF COURSE.
"THE BLACK WIDOW.
"I ALWAYS WONDERED WHY THEY CALLED HER THAT.
"UNTIL THAT DAY.
"JUST LIKE THE DEADLY SPIDER THAT DEVOURS ITS MATE--
"--THIS GIRL WAS JUST AS RUTHLESS.
"AND JUST AS QUIET.
"IT'S FUNNY. YOU SEE SUPER HEROES ON THE NEWS ONCE IN A WHILE--
"--HEAR THEM TALK WHILE THEY'RE FIGHTING--
"--ALMOST SEEMS LIKE THEY'RE HAVING FUN.
"NOT THIS ONE.
"ALL BUSINESS.
"SERIOUS AS A HEART ATTACK.
"SHE WAS A WOMAN WITH A GOAL.
"WOE TO ANYONE--
"--ANYTHING--
"--THAT GOT IN HER WAY.

"AMAZING WOMAN, REALLY.
"POSING AS NANCY RUSHMAN, SHE HAD HEARD FIRST-HAND ABOUT THE BOMB IN THE BANK VAULT.
"ANYBODY ELSE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE BEEN HAPPY JUST TO HAVE GOTTEN OUT OF THERE WITH THEIR LIVES.
"NOT THIS ONE.
"SHE WENT BACK TO SAVE THE OTHERS.
"NOBODY WAS GOING TO STOP HER.
EXCUSE ME, Ma'am-- THIS HERE IS A SECURED AREA.
I'M GOING TO HAVE TO ASK YOU TO LEAVE.
DEPUTY, CLEAR THIS AREA.
IMMEDIATELY.
DEPUTY SHER
THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO DO, MA'AM.
NOW IF YOU'LL JUST COME WITH ME.
=sigh=

I TAKE NO JOY IN THIS.
Whu--?!
SWEEP
STAY
DOWN.
BRRAAZZT
GOTCHA.
JUST DON'T POINT THOSE THINGS AT ME.
THESE "THINGS," AS YOU CALL THEM, ARE MY WIDOW'S STING.
AT THIS SETTING, THEY WOULD TURN YOUR HEAD INTO BORSCHT.
BRGAAKKT
REST ASSURED, DEPUTY...
...YOU ARE NOT MY TARGET.
THE VAULT?!
WHY WOULD YOU BLAST THE VAULT DOOR CLOSED?!

BECAUSE.
FRARA BABOOM!
ANY MORE QUESTIONS?
Um... NOT FROM ME. No.
"BY THEN, I'D JOINED THE REST OF THE CROWD.
"AS GRATEFUL AS WE WERE THAT SHE MANAGED TO SAVE US...
"...THERE WAS SOMETHING-- DISCONCERTING-- ABOUT HER PRESENCE AMONG US.
"SOMETHING FRIGHTENING."

FRIGHTENING?
HOW SO?
WE'RE *SIMPLE PEOPLE* HERE, AGENT.
THIS IS THE TYPE OF *TOWN* WHERE WE DON'T *LOCK* OUR *DOORS* AT NIGHT.
BETWEEN *YOU* AND *ME,* SON...?
I HAVEN'T EVEN *SEEN* MY HOUSE KEY IN THE PAST *TWENTY YEARS.*
THIS *ISN'T* A PLACE WHERE *SUPER HEROES* BELONG.
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE HOW *HAPPY* YOU WERE THAT YOUR *ORDEAL* WAS OVER.
OVER?
I'M AFRAID IT HADN'T EVEN *BEGUN.*

"I HEARD THE BLACK WIDOW USED HER INFLUENCE AS AN AVENGER TO BULLY HER WAY INTO THE INTERROGATION ROOM AT THE PRECINCT--
"--HOPING TO QUESTION THOSE BOYS BEFORE THE FEDERAL AUTHORITIES ARRIVED.
"I HEAR TELL SHE'S NOT REAL BIG ON CIVIL RIGHTS.
"LET'S JUST SAY--
"--THINGS DIDN'T GO WELL.
"APPARENTLY SHE LEARNED ENOUGH THOUGH--
"--TO MAKE HER BELIEVE THEY WERE WORKING WITH AN 'INSIDER' AT THE BANK.
"I INVITED HER IN...
"...TRYING TO IGNORE THE ABSENCE OF FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW.
"NOT THE WARMEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD.
"ENTERING MY HOME--
"--SHE TREATED ME WITH AS MUCH REGARD AS A SPIDER TREATS A COMMON HOUSEFLY.

"SHE SAT *EXACTLY* WHERE YOU'RE SITTING NOW.
"SHE EXPLAINED THAT SINCE *SHE* WAS NANCY RUSHMAN THE *BANK TELLER*--
"--I, AS THE *OTHER* HOSTAGE THEY PULLED FROM THE BANK, *MUST HAVE* BEEN THE INSIDER.
"AT *FIRST* I THOUGHT SHE WAS *TEASING* ME.
"I MEAN, *HOW ABSURD.*
"BUT AS I *SMILED*--
"--*TITTERED* ACTUALLY--
"--SHE JUST *HELD* ME IN THAT *ICE COLD* STARE OF *HERS*...
"...UNTIL I CONFESSED."
"CONFESSED"?
I'M *CONFUSED.*
YOU WERE THE INSIDER?
NO, AGENT TENKO.
I TOLD HER ABOUT... *MY SON.*

"YOU SEE, I TOOK HER *UPSTAIRS*.
"TO *HERVE'S* ROOM.
"IN THE *ATTIC*.
"I HAD BEEN THERE *SO MANY TIMES* THAT I GUESS I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW *SURPRISING* IT WOULD BE FOR SOMEONE TO SEE IT FOR THE *FIRST TIME*.
Hmp.
YOUR SON *APPEARS* TO BE QUITE... *DISTURBED*.
YOU *THINK?*
"I TRIED TO *EXPLAIN* TO HER THAT HERVE HAS NOT BEEN THE SAME SINCE HE LOST HIS JOB *TWO YEARS* AGO.
"HE *BLAMED* IT ON THE *GOVERNMENT*-- SOMETHING ABOUT *BUDGET CUTS*.
"*TRUTH* IS, HE BLAMED *EVERYTHING* ON THE GOVERNMENT.
"SINCE GETTING HIS COMPUTER, HE'D SPEND DAYS ON END HERE-- *TYPING* AWAY TO *HUNDREDS* OF OTHER PEOPLE *JUST LIKE HIM*.
"*LOST* PEOPLE.
"*ANGRY* PEOPLE.
"I *TRIED* TO TELL HER ALL THIS. BUT SHE WASN'T LISTENING.
"SHE WAS ALREADY *SITTING DOWN* AT THE COMPUTER.
"*TYPING*.
"*SEARCHING*.

"MY *FIRST* THOUGHT, OF COURSE, WAS THAT SHE WAS *WASTING* HER TIME.
"*CERTAINLY*-- AT ONE POINT IN HER LIFE-- SHE WAS *SOME SORT* OF *SECRET AGENT*...
ENTER PASSWORD
"...BUT *BREAKING* INTO SOMEONE'S *COMPUTER*...?
"I WAS *WRONG.*
ACCESS DENIED
"PROBABLY LIKE *EVERYONE ELSE* SHE'D EVER MET--
"--I *UNDERESTIMATED* HER.
FREEDOMSLIGHT
CORRESPONDENCES-9
ALL JFK FILES
TONY RANDAL DOCUMENTS
JIM MOONEY TRANSCRIPTS
M.GOLDEN REVIEWS [INCLUDIN
CRITIQUES AND GUN FILES]
MORE ON SALAMASCI...
SLIME-ENCRUSTED ENCEPHELOP
MILK CAN ALSO BE FOUND WIT
THE INK OF THESE PAGES. TRU
BELIEVER (OR IS THAT STALWA
SLYER BEYOND ANY PERSONABL
ACCEPTED CIRCUMSTANCES?]
"IT WAS A *LOT* LIKE WATCHING A *SPIDER* WEAVE ITS *WEB.*
"IF YOU'RE *NOT* A SPIDER, IT LOOKS LIKE JUST A BUNCH OF *STRAY STRANDS* ATTACHED FROM *ONE CORNER* OF THE ROOM TO THE *NEXT.*
"BUT TO THE SPIDER?
WELCOME TO
FREEDOMSLIGHT
THE OFFICIAL CONSIRACY THEORY WEB PAGE
ENTER?
LEAVE?
"SHE *SEES* IT IN HER HEAD FROM THE *BEGINNING.*
"SHE *KNOWS* HOW IT'S GOING TO TURN OUT.
"THAT'S WHY THE *BLACK WIDOW* DIDN'T *FLINCH* WHEN THE SCREEN CAME UP.
"TO *HER*, IT WAS *CONFIRMATION* THAT THE BANK ROBBERS WERE ACTUALLY MEMBERS OF *FREEDOMSLIGHT*...
"...*URBAN TERRORISTS* DEDICATED TO *OVERTHROWING* THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT.
"TO *ME*...?

"...TO *ME* IT WAS THE *END* OF THE WORLD.
"OF *MY* WORLD.
"SHOWING THE *SLIGHTEST* HINT OF COMPASSION--
"--TO A WOMAN WHO JUST LEARNED *HER SON* WAS A *TERRORIST*--
"--SHE HELPED ME TO THE *CHAIR*.
"SHE MADE ME *PROMISE* THAT IF I HEARD FROM HERVE IN THE *NEXT FEW DAYS*--
"--I WAS TO CONTACT HER *DIRECTLY*.
"SHE EXPLAINED IT WAS MY *BEST CHANCE* TO SEE HIM *ALIVE* AGAIN.
" 'BUT DO NOT *MISTAKE* THAT FOR A *PROMISE*,' SHE SAID.
WHEN YOU *REALIZED* YOUR SON WAS INVOLVED IN *PLANNING* THE BANK ROBBERY-- *WHAT* DID YOU DO *THEN?*
I DID WHAT *ANY* MOTHER WOULD DO FOR HER CHILD.
I *WEPT*.
"I WEPT FOR WHAT HE HAD *BECOME*.
"I WEPT FOR WHAT *MIGHT HAVE BEEN*.

"THE NEXT MORNING...
"...THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES WERE TAKING THE FOUR MEMBERS OF FREEDOMSLIGHT TO THE CLOSEST F.B.I. OFFICE.
ANARCHISTS AIN'T POPULAR AROUND THESE PARTS.
Urhn!
WAK
AND THERE ARE PLACES IN THIS COUNTRY, "OFFICER"--
?!?!
--WHERE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE FED UP WITH TRYING TO LIVE THEIR LIVES BENEATH THE BOOT OF FASCISTS LIKE YOU!
SMAK
WHUMP
THIS GREAT NATION WAS FORGED IN THE FIRES OF A REVOLUTION!
IT IS TIME THAT WE THE PEOPLE ONCE AGAIN STOKE THE FLAMES OF OUR DISCONTENT!
"AN ELOQUENT-- DEADLY-- PASSIONATE WOMAN.
"HER MISSION STATEMENT WAS LOST ON THEM...
"...UNCONSCIOUS AS THEY WERE.

YOU'RE *HER*... *AREN'T* YOU?
WHAT DO *YOU* THINK?
FOR *YEARS* NOW, I HAVE BEEN THE *SILENT VOICE* THAT HAS *CALLED* YOU TO *OUR CAUSE.*
I HAVE STOOD *BLACK* WITHIN THE SHADOWS OF A PEOPLE LOST IN THE *DARKNESS* OF *OPPRESSION--*
--SEARCHING FOR A LIGHT THAT WILL ONCE AGAIN *RETURN* TO THEM THE *FREEDOMS* UPON WHICH THE *UNITED STATES* WAS *FOUNDED.*
I AM THE *WINDS* OF *CHANGE.*
I AM THE *FIRE NEXT TIME.*
I AM... *THE EBON FLAME.*

NOT THAT WE'RE NOT GRATEFUL, BUT...
BUT, WHAT?
...AFTER ALL THIS TIME, WHY REVEAL YOURSELF TO US NOW?
IN PART, BECAUSE YOU'VE EARNED IT.
YOU FACED PRISON ON BEHALF OF OUR CAUSE--
--YET YOU REVEALED NOTHING TO THAT RUSSIAN WITCH.
BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT IS BECAUSE WE ARE READY.
TIRED OF WAITING AND WATCHING AS THIS GREAT COUNTRY OF OURS CHOKES TO DEATH ON ITS OWN BUREAUCRATIC HYPOCRISY--
--FREEDOMSLIGHT IS AT LAST PREPARED TO DESTROY THE ENEMIES OF ALL THINGS AMERICAN!
WELCOME TO THE REVOLUTION.
WELCOME HOME.

EXCUSE ME.
LOTTIE, HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THIS?
UNLESS... UNLESS YOU WERE THERE!
THERE?
WHY ON EARTH WOULD I BE THERE?!
I'M AN OLD WOMAN, WHAT WOULD THEY--
LOTTIE?!
!
C-Can't... breathe...
LIE STILL, Mrs. HEDERMAN... IT MIGHT BE A HEART ATTACK--
--BROUGHT ON BY THE STRESS OF THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS.
DON'T MOVE, I'LL GET YOU HELP.
Thank... You...
Shhhh.
YES, THIS IS AGENT TENKO OF THE F.B.I.
I NEED AN AMBULANCE RIGHT AWAY.
DON'T DIE ON ME, Mrs. HEDERMAN.
NOT YET.
NEXT ISSUE: TRAVEL FURTHER ON THIS JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY AS THE BLACK WIDOW BATTLES THE EBON FLAME!

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LOBDELL
GREEN
KETCHAM
JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY™
R. GREEN
R. KETCHAM
ATOMIC
FEATURING:
BLACK WIDOW™

"WOULD *I* HAVE BEEN SMILING?
"I MEAN, IF *I* WERE THE ONE SETTING OFF *EXPLOSIONS*--
"--LEAPING CLEAR OF *FIREBALLS*--
"--PREPARING TO STAND *ALONE* AGAINST AN *ARMY* OF WELL-TRAINED SOLDIERS?
Stan Lee Presents: JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY Featuring THE BLACK WIDOW in
THE FIRE NEXT TIME...
CHAPTER TWO
By
SCOTT LOBDELL WRITER
RANDY GREEN PENCILER
RICK KETCHAM INKER
JON BABCOCK: LETTERER
STEVE OLIFF: COLORIST
JOE ANDREANI: EDITOR
BOB HARRAS: EDITOR IN CHIEF
"NO.
"BUT THEN I'M *NOT* NATASHA ROMANOFF.
"I'M NOT THE *BLACK WIDOW.*

"SHE WAS *ONCE* AN INTERNATIONAL SPY--
"--*TRAINED* FOR THAT SORT OF THING.
"EVEN NOW, SHE'S AN *AVENGER*--
"--ONE OF EARTH'S *MIGHTIEST* HEROES--
"--*USED* TO *MIXING IT UP* WITH OTHER-DIMENSIONAL WARLORDS--
"--AND WORLD-DEVOURING *SUPER BEINGS.*
"WHICH BEGS THE *QUESTION:*
"WHAT WAS SHE DOING *THERE?*
"AT THE *FREEDOMSLIGHT* COMPOUND--
"--SOMEWHERE IN THE *WILDS* OF *MAINE?*
"EVEN THOUGH IT WAS *HER*--
"--ONE *LONE* WOMAN-- AGAINST A SMALL *ARMY* OF WELL-ARMED, WELL-TRAINED *SOLDIERS...*
"...IT WAS *ALMOST* UNFAIR.
"*THEY* DIDN'T STAND A *CHANCE.*
"STANDING SILENTLY AMIDST THE *BATTERED* AND *BROKEN* BODIES OF HER OPPONENTS--
"--THERE WAS EVERY *INDICATION* THAT SHE WAS *VICTORIOUS.*
"THAT SHE HAD *NOTHING* TO FEAR.
"BUT *SOMEHOW...?*
"SOMEHOW SHE *KNEW.*

"IN THE INSTANT BETWEEN THE TRIGGER BEING *PULLED*...
"...AND THE BAZOOKA SHELL BEING *FIRED*...
"...SHE WAS *ALREADY* IN MOTION.
"IT WAS *AMAZING* TO SEE.

SOMEHOW, SHE *KNOWS* THAT WE ARE ON THE VERY *EVE* OF OUR *GREATEST SUCCESS.*
SIFT THE *WRECKAGE,* GENTLEMEN.
BRING ME THE *REMAINS* OF OUR ENEMY.
BUT MA'AM-- *NO ONE* COULD HAVE LIVED THROUGH *THAT.*
THAT IS *EXACTLY* WHAT SHE WANTS YOU TO BELIEVE.
THAT'S WHAT A *BLACK WIDOW SPIDER* DOES... SHE LULLS YOU INTO A FALSE SENSE OF *SECURITY*--
--THEN SHE *STRIKES.*
"HOW *SIMILAR* THE TWO WOMEN WERE--

--IN THEIR *OWN* FASHION, OF COURSE.
ONE WAS AN *AGENT*... THE OTHER, AN *ANARCHIST*.
BUT THESE STRONG-WILLED WOMEN HAD MORE IN COMMON ≈COUGH COUGH≈ THAN EITHER ONE WOULD *EVER* ADMIT.
Mrs. HEDERMAN-- *LOTTIE*-- PLEASE, *REST*.
I *BROUGHT* YOU HERE TO THE HOSPITAL BECAUSE YOU WERE HAVING *CHEST PAINS*.
AFTER EVERYTHING YOU'VE BEEN *THROUGH* IN THE LAST WEEK...*
...YOU NEED TO TAKE TIME TO GET *BETTER* BEFORE YOU TELL ME THE *REST* OF YOUR STORY.
THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF TIME *LATER*, TRUST ME.
*I.E., WITNESS TO A BANK ROBBERY AS WELL AS AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE FREEDOMSLIGHT MOVEMENT AMONG OTHER THINGS THAT HAPPENED LAST ISSUE... ...Just Ask Joe
YOU SAY THAT BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO *ARREST* ME-- AREN'T YOU, AGENT TENKO?
YES.
I'M AFRAID I *HAVE* TO.
DON'T *APOLOGIZE*, SON. I KNEW IF I KEPT TALKING LONG ENOUGH-- YOU'D *REALIZE*...
...THAT I WAS *THERE* THE WHOLE TIME.
I SAW IT ALL.
MAY HEAVEN *FORGIVE* AN OLD WOMAN'S SOUL...
...I SAW IT *ALL*.

"SHORTLY AFTER THE BLACK WIDOW *LEFT* MY HOME--
"--I HAD *MORE* COMPANY.
"AT *FIRST* I HAD HOPED IT WAS MY MISSING SON, *HERVE*...
"...THAT HE HAD SENT HIS COMRADES-IN-ARMS FOR ME.
"IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT, I WAS TAKEN TO THEIR *SECRET COMPOUND.*
"THERE I MET THE *EBON FLAME*-- A WOMAN WHO...
"...UNTIL *THAT* NIGHT...
"...HAD BEEN NOTHING MORE THAN A *LEGEND* AMONG HER OWN PEOPLE.
"BEFORE SHE COULD TELL ME WHY I WAS *THERE*--
"--THE *BLACK WIDOW* MADE *HER* PRESENCE KNOWN.

"BUT IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARD...
THERE'S NO *SIGN* OF HER, MA'AM.
I'M NOT SURPRISED.
KEEP LOOKING.
Mrs. HEDERMAN...
...YOU ARE PROBABLY *WONDERING* WHY YOU'RE HERE?
THE THOUGHT *HAD* OCCURRED TO ME, YES.
WHILE I DIDN'T MEAN TO GET YOU INVOLVED IN OUR *BATTLE*, I FELT YOU SHOULD BE HERE ON THE NIGHT OF OUR GREATEST *SUCCESS*.
BECAUSE OF YOUR CONNECTION TO *HERVE*.
MY *SON...?*
MORE THAN YOUR SON...
...HE IS THE MAN THAT I *LOVE*.
?!
Oh.
YOU'VE... *MET* MY SON?
NOT DIRECTLY, NO.
I DIDN'T MEAN TO IMPLY THAT WE'VE BEEN *...TOGETHER*.
RATHER, I FELL IN LOVE WITH HIS *WRITING*.
I HAD LONG AGO STARTED READING HIS POSTS ON THE INTERNET.
HIS TREATISE ON THE *WIDENING GAP* BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR...
...ABOUT THE AMERICAN DREAM BEING A *LIE*...
...IT WAS NOTHING SHORT OF *POETRY*.
BECAUSE YOUR SON HAS GONE *UNDERGROUND* FOR THE MOMENT...
...I WANTED *YOU* HERE AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL HE *STANDS* FOR.
"WHAT COULD I *SAY...?*

...IT HAD BEEN *MONTHS* SINCE I HAD SEEN MY SON.
AND TO *LISTEN* TO THIS YOUNG WOMAN-- THIS YOUNG *WARRIOR*-- WHO WAS SO *INSPIRED* BY HIM...
...IT WAS THE *CLOSEST* I HAD BEEN TO HERVE IN SUCH A *LONG* TIME.
I CAN *APPRECIATE* THAT, LOTTIE--
--BUT YOU *MUST* HAVE KNOWN YOU WERE GETTING INVOLVED WITH *URBAN TERRORISTS.*
YOU *MUST* HAVE KNOWN THAT WHAT YOU WERE DOING WAS *WRONG.*
WHEN IS IT *WRONG* TO STAND UP FOR WHAT YOU *BELIEVE* IN, SON?
HOW OFTEN HAVE TODAY'S *REVOLUTIONARIES* BEEN TOMORROW'S *WAR HEROES?*
WE'RE NOT A GROWING COUNTRY TRYING *DESPERATELY* TO *FREE* OURSELVES FROM THE SHADOW OF THE ENGLISH EMPIRE ANY MORE, LOTTIE.
AMERICA IS A *DEMOCRACY*... A FREE COUNTRY WITH *MANY* AVENUES BY WHICH WE CAN BRING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE *WITHOUT* BLOODSHED.
PEOPLE LIKE *FREEDOMSLIGHT* MAKE A *MOCKERY* OF EVERY WAR WE'VE EVER *FOUGHT* IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM.
YOU'RE *RIGHT,* OF COURSE... I *KNOW* YOU ARE.
BUT...?
BUT I CAME TO SEE EBON FLAME NOT AS *LEGEND*... BUT AS A *PERSON.*
SOMEONE WITH A DREAM OF A *BETTER WORLD.*
WHICH IS WHY I WAS SO... *ANGRY*... THAT SHE ALMOST *DIED* AT THE HANDS OF THE BLACK WIDOW.

"IT WAS THE NEXT EVENING...
"...IN THE SEABOARD CITY OF *PORTLAND, MAINE...*
"...A WELL-GUARDED DOCK WAS ABOUT TO BE UNDER *ATTACK.*
"TO THEIR *CREDIT,* THE SECURITY GUARDS *SPOTTED* THEIR ASSAILANTS.
"RATHER, *MOST* OF THEM.
"THE *IMPRESSIVE* THING, WHICH I LEARNED LATER...
"...THESE MEN WERE UNDERCOVER *S.H.I.E.L.D.* AGENTS.
"*TRAINED* TO BE THE BEST.
"FOR ALL THE *GOOD* IT DID THEM.
"IN MANY WAYS, EBON FLAME WAS *JUST* AS DANGEROUS--
"--JUST AS POTENTIALLY *DEADLY*--
SECURIT
"--AS THE *BLACK WIDOW* HERSELF.
"BUT SHE WASN'T THERE THAT EVENING TO *KILL...*

BUT THEY'RE THE *ENEMY.* THEY SHOULD--
ENOUGH! I WILL *NOT* HAVE MY ORDERS *QUESTIONED.*
BELIEVE ME, ONCE WE HAVE WHAT WE *CAME* FOR...
...*EVERY ONE* OF OUR ENEMIES WILL *FALL.*
NOW *COME,* BEFORE ANY POSSIBILITY OF A *BACK-UP* ARRIVES.
WAIT A MOMENT... YOU COULDN'T *POSSIBLY* HAVE--
--*BEEN* THERE? NO, I *WASN'T.*
I LEARNED THE DETAILS OF THE EVENING *LATER*...
...FROM *EBON FLAME* HERSELF...
"...WHO WAS *OUTRAGED* WHEN SHE FINALLY MADE IT *INSIDE* THE WAREHOUSE.
"THERE SHE DISCOVERED SHE WAS NOT THE *FIRST* PERSON TO ARRIVE.
YOU?!
WAS THERE ANY *DOUBT?*

I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE *EASIER* FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED--
--IF I TOOK OUT THE REMAINING GUARDS *MYSELF*.
I WAS GENTLE.
YOU SEE, MY... *SOURCES*... TOLD ME YOU WERE HERE FOR *THIS*.
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO *NOW*... IS *TAKE* IT.
GLADLY.
KILL HER.
"AND THEY DID.
"OR THEY *TRIED* TO, ANYWAY.

"THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER OFF TRYING TO KILL THE *NIGHT*.
"THE WOMAN IS *UNSTOPPABLE*.
"I DIDN'T *SEE* THAT FIGHT, NO...
"...BUT I HAD WITNESSED HER IN *ACTION* THE NIGHT BEFORE.
"IT WAS OVER...
"...FOR THE *SOLDIERS*, ANYWAY...
"...BEFORE IT HAD EVEN *BEGUN*.
"BUT THE WIDOW KNEW *BETTER* THAN TO RELAX.
"SHE KNEW THAT SOMEWHERE IN THE *DARKNESS*...
"...THE ENEMY WAS *WAITING*.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO *END* THIS WAY, BLACK WIDOW.
Shhhh.
"SHHHH" *WHAT?*
Shhhh, OR YOU'LL *MISS* THE BEST PART.
THIS END UP
THIS IS WHERE I *KILL* YOU.

EXPLAIN TO ME, SISTER...
...WHY DO YOU FIGHT ON THEIR SIDE?
LET'S START OUT SIMPLY.
FIRST, I AM NOT YOUR SISTER.
NOW... DEFINE "THEIR SIDE".
THEM. THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT!
YOU WERE BORN IN RUSSIA! I WOULD THINK...
NO, YOU DON'T THINK.
OR YOU WOULD KNOW IT IS NOT A GOVERNMENT I SEEK TO DEFEND.
RATHER THE PEOPLE THAT LIVE HERE.
PEOPLE WHO SHOULD BE FREE FROM LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF TERROR OF SO-CALLED REVOLUTIONARIES SUCH AS YOURSELF!
THOSE ARE THE VERY PEOPLE WE'RE TRYING TO HELP-- TO LIBERATE!

I DON'T SEE IT THAT WAY.
DON'T YOU *UNDERSTAND?!* ALL WE'RE ASKING FOR IS THE *RIGHT* TO BE HEARD!
THEN YOU COULD DO BETTER THAN TO *SHOUT* OVER THE SOUND OF YOUR OWN *REVOLUTION.*
WE FIGHT BECAUSE WE *HAVE* TO FIGHT!
BUT BELIEVE ME WHEN I *SAY*--
--WE DON'T WANT TO *HURT* ANYONE!
I REMAIN *UNCONVINCED.*

"AFTER THE GUNFIRE STOPPED--
"--I CONVINCED THE OTHERS IT WAS SAFE TO ENTER.
"I SPOTTED HER *FIRST*... LYING IN THE SHADOWS.
EBON...?
I'M FINE, WOMAN.
SHE GOT AWAY...
...BUT WE GOT WHAT WE *CAME* FOR!
BY THE END OF THE DAY, TOMORROW-- THE *ENTIRE WORLD* WILL KNOW OF THE *FREEDOMS-LIGHT* MOVEMENT!
"I HELPED HER TO THE VAN AND WE WOUND UP GETTING AWAY.
" '*WE*.' HA!
"WILL YOU *LISTEN* TO ME? *ME*... AN *EIGHTY*-YEAR-OLD WOMAN CARRYING ON LIKE I'M PART OF THE *FRENCH RESISTANCE*.
"I *KNOW* WHAT I WAS DOING WAS WRONG.
"I KNEW IT AT THE *TIME*.
"BUT THE *TRUTH* OF THE MATTER IS...
"...I WAS HAVING THE *TIME* OF MY *LIFE*!"

NOPE.
I'M *SORRY.*
I DON'T *BUY* IT.
SOME OF IT, YES. BUT NOT *ALL* OF IT.
YOU WERE A HOSTAGE, LOTTIE. AN OLD ONE AT THAT.
WHAT WOULD POSSIBLY POSSESS THEM TO ALLOW YOU TO ACCOMPANY THEM... LET ALONE SERVE AS BACK-UP?
ISN'T IT *OBVIOUS?*
THEY WERE GOING TO USE ME A-AS A HUMAN *SH-SHIELD.* A H-HOSTAGE IN *C-CASE* I...
...I!
EIIEE....!
LOTTIE--?!
I NEED SOME *HELP* HERE!
DOCTOR, Mrs. LEDERMAN--
--SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN QUESTIONED IN THE FIRST PLACE! I WARNED YOU ABOUT THAT!
I *HAD* TO, DOCTOR--
--IT WAS A MATTER OF *LIFE...*
...OR...

SOON...
THIS *CAN'T* BE HAPPENING.
IT CAN'T.
THE FATE OF AN *ENTIRE* NATION DEPENDS UPON ME LEARNING THE *TRUTH* ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED.
WHAT WAS IT SHE SAID, WHEN I FIRST MET HER?
"I CAN'T TELL YOU THE *TRUTH.*
"I CAN ONLY TELL YOU WHAT I *KNOW.*"
LIVE, LOTTIE.
LIVE *LONG ENOUGH* TO TELL ME WHAT YOU *KNOW.*
I'LL FIGURE THE *TRUTH* OUT ON MY *OWN.*
NEXT THE STING!

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FEATURING:
THE BLACK WIDOW

"THERE WAS SOMETHING *ROMANTIC* ABOUT IT.
"ABOUT THE *VIOLENCE* THAT THIS YOUNG WOMAN WAS CAPABLE OF INFLICTING ON A *DOZEN* MEN NEARLY *TWICE* HER SIZE.
"I REMEMBER THINKING AT THE TIME...
"...WAS IT HER *TRAINING?*
"WAS IT THE *WEAPONS* SHE WAS USING?
"OR WAS IT SIMPLY A *MATTER* OF *SURVIVAL?*
"I LEARNED *LATER*, IT WAS *NONE* OF THESE.
"IT WAS *CONVICTION*.
"IT WAS HER UNSHAKABLE CONVICTION THAT SHE WAS DOING THE *RIGHT THING*.
Stan Lee Presents:
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Featuring THE BLACK WIDOW in
THE FIRE NEXT TIME...
CHAPTER THREE
SCOTT LOBDELL WRITER
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"I *SHOULD* HAVE SUSPECTED--
"--RATHER WE *ALL* SHOULD HAVE SUSPECTED--
"--WHEN *EBON FLAME* HAD ORDERED HER SOLDIERS IN *FREEDOMSLIGHT* NOT TO OPEN FIRE ON THE *S.H.I.E.L.D.* AGENTS.
"BUT... THE *DRAMA* OF THE *MOMENT* AND ALL...
"YOU SEE, WE HAD BROKEN INTO A S.H.I.E.L.D. *WAREHOUSE.*
"AT *ANY MOMENT,* BACK-UP COULD ARRIVE.
"WE *COULD* HAVE BEEN OUTNUMBERED... OVERWHELMED.
"*SHE* WASN'T AFRAID, HOWEVER.
"SHE WAS *NEVER* AFRAID."
WE'RE HERE TO *CHANGE* THE *WORLD,* MY FRIENDS!
ZAAKT!
NOTHING-- NO ONE-- IS GOING TO STOP US FROM *FINALLY ACHIEVING* OUR *MANIFEST DESTINY!*

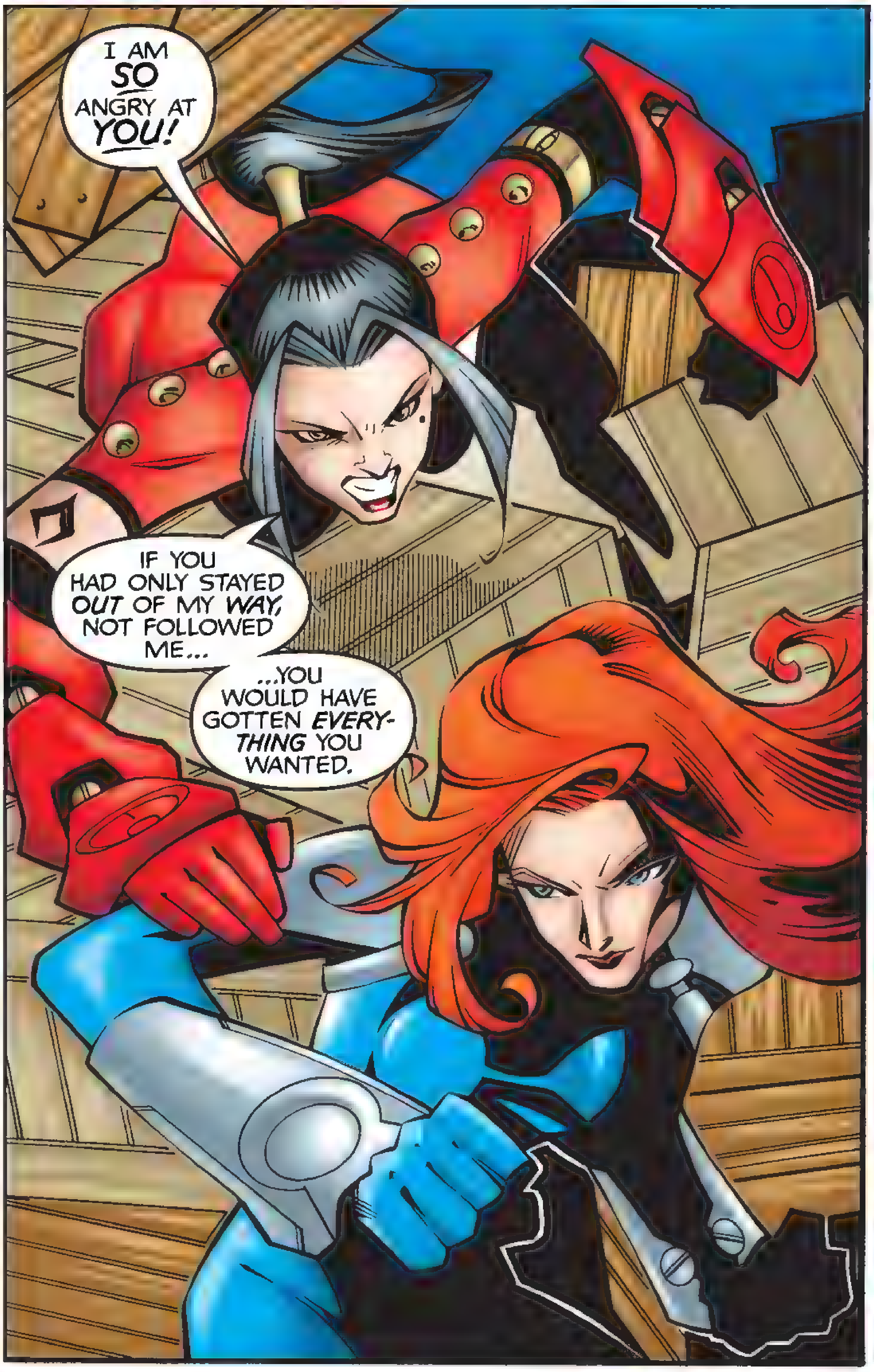
"WE?"
PARDON?
YOU *KEEP* SAYING "WE."
"WE BROKE IN..."
"WE COULD HAVE BEEN OVERWHELMED."
DID I?
I MEANT *"THEY..."* "THEM."
LOTTIE, PLEASE-- YOU *PROMISED,* IF *NOT* THE TRUTH...
...YOU'D TELL ME WHAT YOU *KNOW.*
WERE YOU A MEMBER OF *FREEDOMS-LIGHT?*
NO.
I *WAS* THERE... BECAUSE OF MY SON.
HERVE. HE WAS ONE OF THEM.
IS *THAT* SO WRONG?
IS IT WRONG FOR A *MOTHER* TO DO *ANY*THING...
...GO *ANY*WHERE...
...IN HOPES OF *SEEING* HER SON AGAIN?
DID YOU?
SEE HIM?

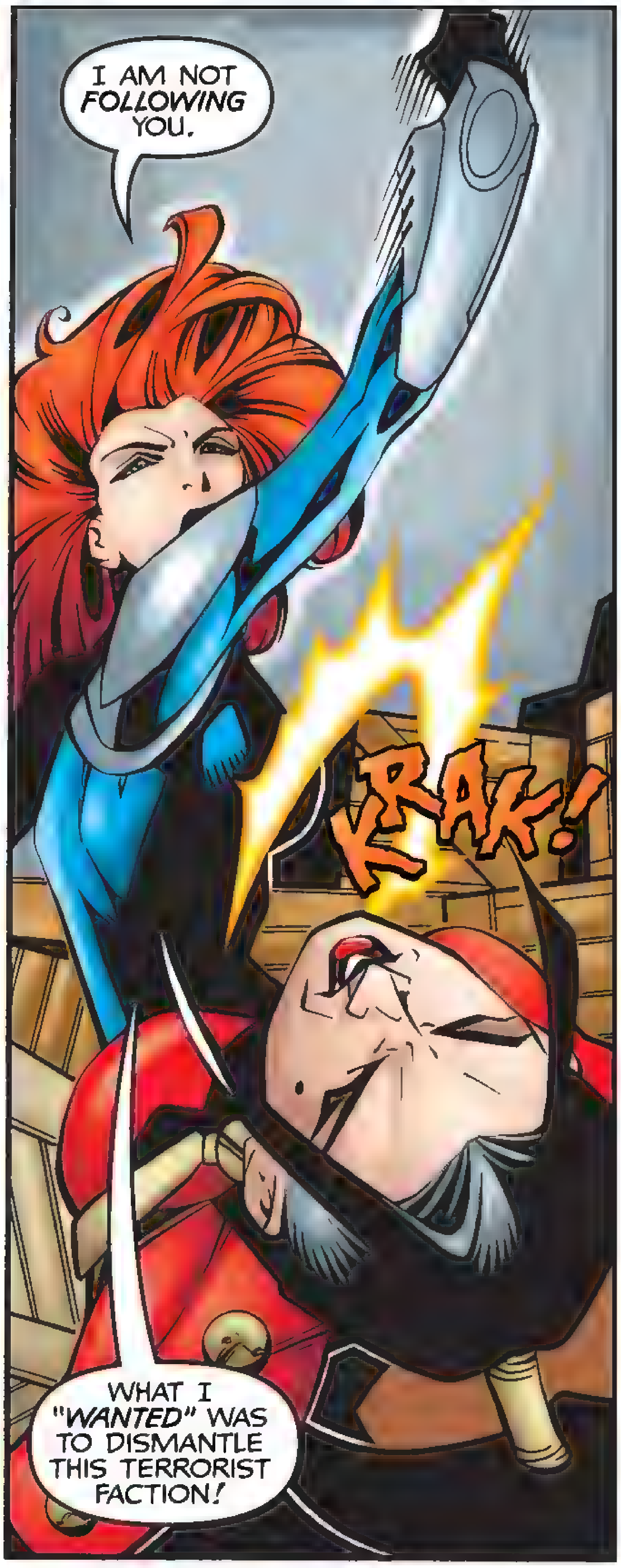
"NO. I DID NOT.
"BUT WHAT I *DID* SEE...?
AT *LAST.*
AFTER *FIVE YEARS* OF STRUGGLE AND SACRIFICE...
...AFTER *HALF A DECADE* SPENT FORGING AN *ARMY* OF SOLDIERS FROM THE REMAINS OF A COUNTRY THAT WAS FORGED BY THE *PASSION* OF *FREEDOM FIGHTERS...*
...AT *LAST, ALL* THAT I HAVE SOUGHT IS *BEFORE* ME.
WHAT... IS IT?

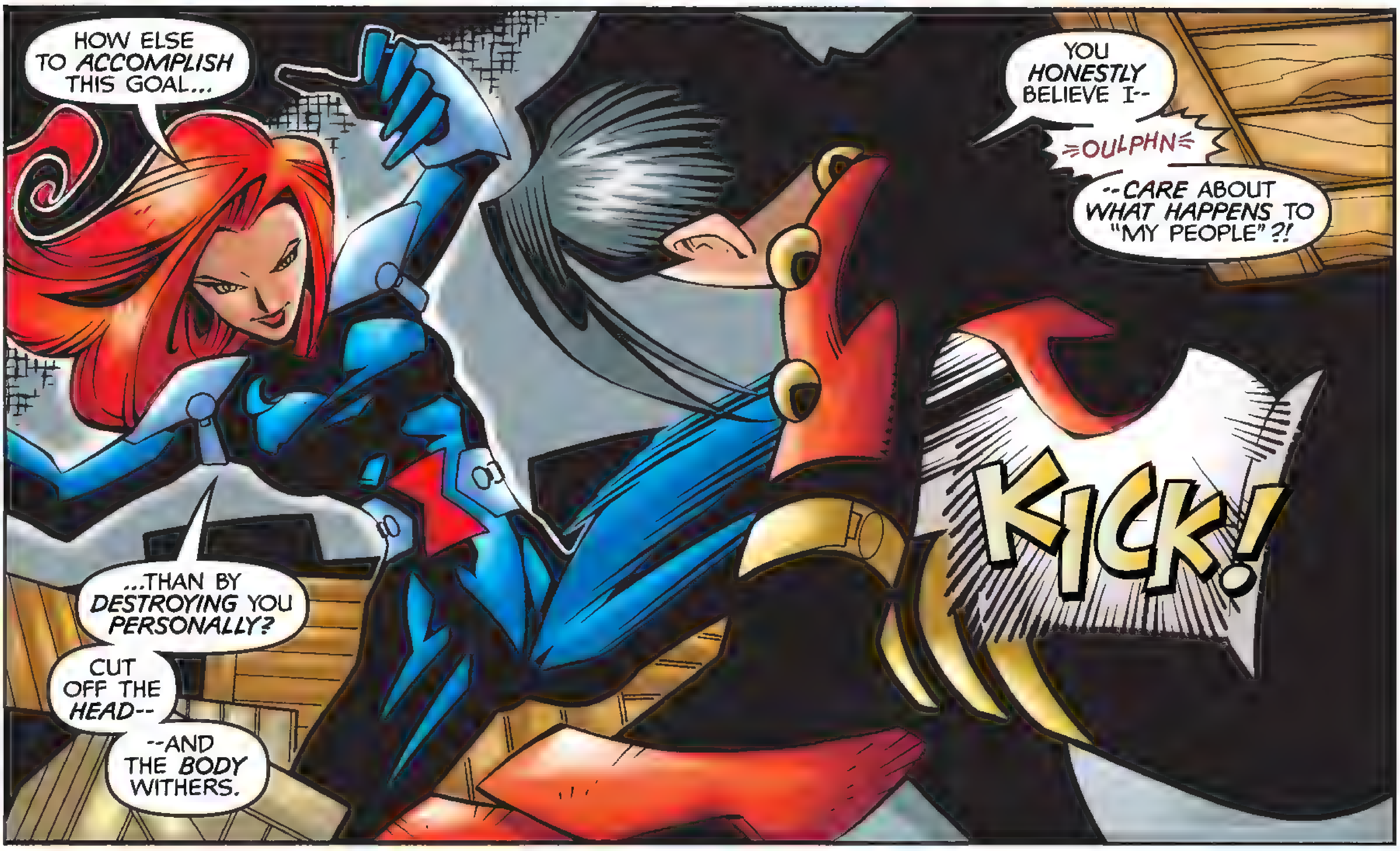
IT IS CALLED THE *CEREBRAL MATRIX.*
SINCE ITS *CREATION,* S.H.I.E.L.D. HAS *DENIED* ITS *EXISTENCE.*
IS IT A *WEAPON?*
NOT *YET,* NO.
IN THE *EARLY* PART OF THE LAST DECADE, EACH S.H.I.E.L.D. AGENT WAS *"PLUGGED"* WITH A *SUBCRANIAL SCANNING DEVICE.*
IDEALLY, IT ALLOWED S.H.I.E.L.D. TO TRACK *ANY AGENT, ANYWHERE* ON EARTH.
THE *ULTIMATE* BACK-UP.
ULTIMATELY, A BUNCH OF *CIVIL LIBERTIES LAWYERS* THOUGHT IT WAS A *VIOLATION* OF THE AGENTS' *RIGHTS.*
THE *PROGRAM* WAS *SCRAPPED.*
SUPPOSEDLY.
WITH THE *TRIGGER* THAT WE STOLE LAST NIGHT*--
--WE CAN *INITIATE* THE CEREBRAL MATRIX'S *FAIL-SAFE* DEVICE*!*
*OR, MORE ACCURATELY, LAST ISSUE --Joe.
FAIL-SAFE...?
EACH SCANNING UNIT WAS EQUIPPED WITH A *SELF-DESTRUCT DEVICE.*
THAT WAY, IF AN AGENT *DIED* WHILE *UNDER COVER,* S.H.I.E.L.D. WOULD BE ABLE TO *ERASE* ANY *EVIDENCE* OF THEIR *INVOLVEMENT.*
WE PLAN TO STRIKE A *CRIPPLING BLOW* AGAINST THE *INTERNATIONAL AGENCY* BY TRIGGERING *ALL* THE DESTRUCT BUTTONS *AT ONCE.*
JUST *THINK:* A *FLIP* OF A *SWITCH...*
...AND AN *ENTIRE NATION* IS *FREE* FROM THE *OPPRESSION* THAT IS *S.H.I.E.L.D.!*

THAT IS *NOT* LIKELY TO HAPPEN.
BLACK WIDOW?!
KILL HER! KILL HER *NOW!*
THAT--
--IS EVEN *LESS* LIKELY.
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
"TO BE *HONEST*...?
"I *PARTLY* WONDERED WHY THEY DIDN'T JUST *PUT DOWN* THEIR WEAPONS AND SURRENDER BEFORE *SOMEBODY* GOT HURT."

"BUT I GUESS *TERRORISTS* ARE *DUMB* THAT WAY.
"EVEN *URBAN* TERRORISTS.
"I THINK THEY GOT SO *WRAPPED UP* IN THEIR *OWN* CAUSE...
"...THEY FORGOT THERE WERE PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED *DIFFERENTLY.*
"THEY MAY HAVE BEEN *BORN* AMERICAN--
"--AND FELT THAT THE COUNTRY THEY *LOVED* HAD LET THEM DOWN.
"SO IN A *WAY,* THEY WERE *FIGHTING* FOR SOMETHING THEY *NEVER* HAD.
"BUT *HER?*
"NATASHA ROMANOV *CHOSE* AMERICA.
"SHE WAS FIGHTING TO *HOLD* ONTO WHAT SHE *DID* HAVE.
"AND *UNLIKE* EBON FLAME--
"--SHE WASN'T *NEARLY* AS *GENTLE* ABOUT IT."


I AM *SO* ANGRY AT *YOU!*
IF YOU HAD ONLY STAYED *OUT* OF MY *WAY,* NOT FOLLOWED ME...
...YOU WOULD HAVE GOTTEN *EVERYTHING* YOU WANTED.


I AM NOT *FOLLOWING* YOU.
KRAK!
WHAT I *"WANTED"* WAS TO DISMANTLE THIS TERRORIST FACTION!


HOW ELSE TO *ACCOMPLISH* THIS GOAL...
YOU *HONESTLY* BELIEVE I--
OULPHN
--*CARE* ABOUT *WHAT HAPPENS* TO "MY PEOPLE"?!
...THAN BY *DESTROYING* YOU *PERSONALLY?*
CUT OFF THE *HEAD*--
--AND THE *BODY* WITHERS.
KICK!

THEY ARE *SHEEP!*
MINDLESS, ANCHORLESS, DIRECTIONLESS MISFITS--
--LOOKING FOR A *PLACE,* A *REASON,* TO *BELONG!*
KRAAKT!
ARE YOU CLAIMING YOU WERE ONLY *TAKING ADVANTAGE* OF THEM?
YOU DO NOT CARE *WHO* IS BURNED BY THE *HEAT* OF YOUR *FLAME?*
I AM *SAYING* THEY WERE A *MEANS* TO AN *END.*
ONCE THEY HAVE *OUTLIVED* THEIR USEFULNESS--
--I WILL DESTROY *THEM* AS *EASILY* AS I HAVE DESTROYED YOU*!*

"A MOMENT *LATER*, IT WAS *OVER*...
"...IN A WAY I COULD *NEVER HAVE IMAGINED*."
YOU *REALIZE* I COULD KILL YOU.
BUT IT WOULD BE *WRONG* TO KILL ONE OF MY OWN.
SO IT *IS* TRUE THEN--
--YOU'RE A *S.H.I.E.L.D.* AGENT AS WELL?
YES, I AM. *FIVE* YEARS AGO, I WAS SENT *UNDERCOVER* IN ORDER TO MONITOR THE SO-CALLED *"HATE GROUPS"* THAT WERE GAINING *PROMINENCE* ACROSS THE COUNTRY.
I FELT THE *EASIEST* WAY TO DO THAT WAS BY BRINGING THEM UNDER *ONE BANNER*.
SO *FREEDOMSLIGHT* WAS BORN!
N-NO... *SAY* IT ISN'T *TRUE!*
BUT THE *POWER* YOU'VE FELT, IN YOUR *NEW POSITION...?*
SORRY. IT WAS *TOO TEMPTING*.
ALLOW ME TO *REMOVE* SAID TEMPTATION.
ZAKT!
NOOOO! I WAS GOING TO USE THE *MONEY* I *EXTORTED* FROM S.H.I.E.L.D. TO *START* A *NEW LIFE!*
SOME TERRORIST *YOU* TURNED OUT TO BE!
KIK!

EBON ESCAPED... AND... BLACK WIDOW BROUGHT ME... *HOME.*
TO THINK... THE WOMAN EVERYONE... *THOUGHT* WAS... A *LEADER*...
...WAS LITTLE MORE... THAN A *COMMON*... *THIEF.*
QUITE *DISAPPOINTING,* I'D IMAGINE.
MOSTLY I WAS... DISAPPOINTED... BECAUSE I...
...NEVER GOT... TO *SEE*...
...MY *SON.*
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
THEN... THAT WAS *IT.*
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

YEAH, *WELL*...
TOO BAD FOR YOU.
NOW, SINCE YOU AND I ARE THE *ONLY TWO PEOPLE* WHO KNOW THE *TRUTH* ABOUT EBON FLAME...
KLIK
STOP PAUSE PLAY FF REW REC
...THOUGHT WAS...A LEADER... WAS LITTLE MORE... THAN A COMMON... THIEF.
CHK
...LET'S JUST KEEP THAT BETWEEN US.

SHHRRRIIIP
TEEEARR
RIIIPPP
CCHHRRIIIPPT

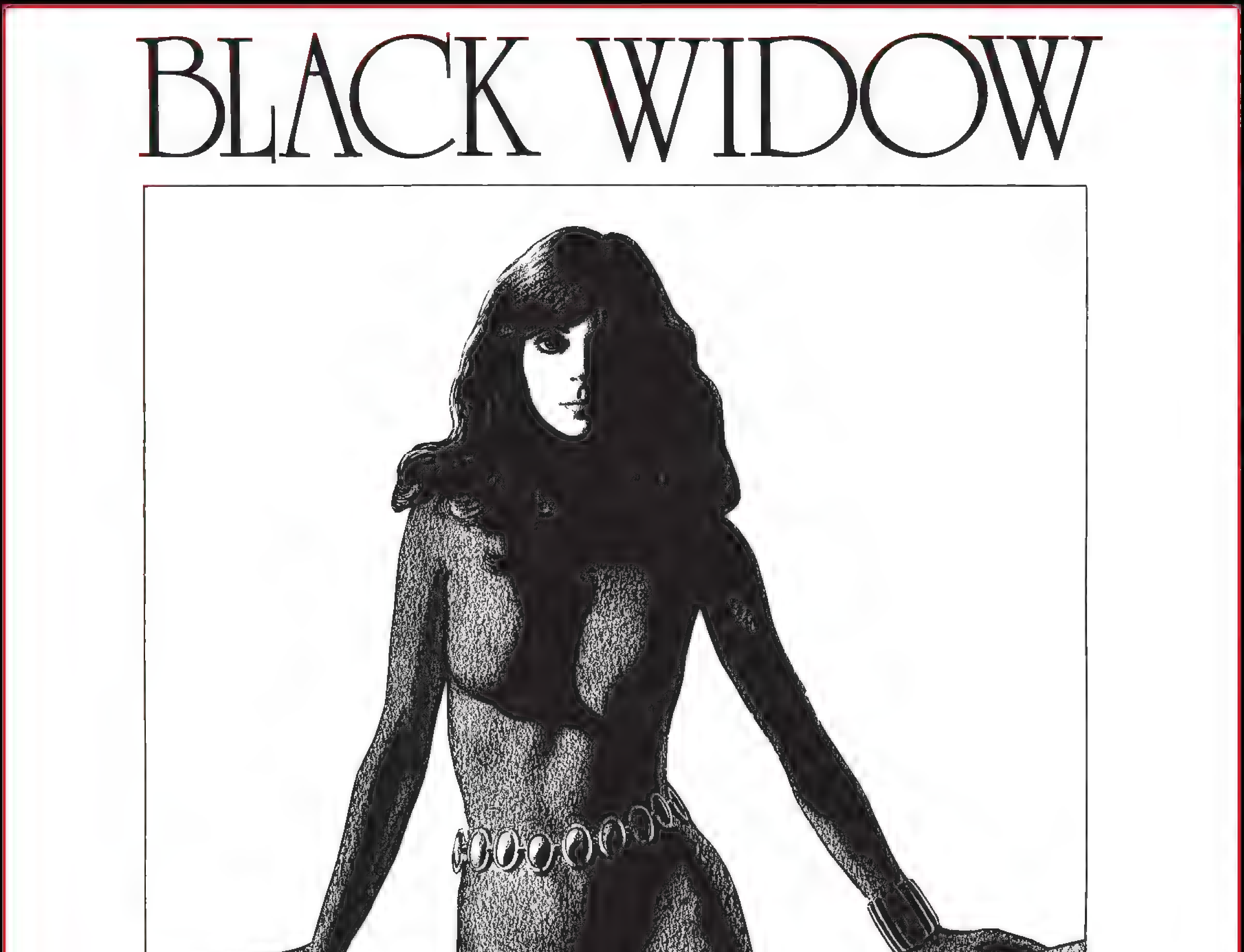
SOME TIME LATER...
CONFUSED?
LET ME BREAK IT DOWN FOR YOU.
UP UNTIL THREE DAYS AGO, THERE REALLY WAS A LOTTIE HEDERMAN.
SHE WAS NOT, BY ANYONE'S STANDARDS, A VERY NICE PERSON.
"DURING WORLD WAR II, SHE WAS LOTTIE EIKENSKI. A DEATH CAMP COMMANDER WHO ENJOYED HER WORK.
"AFTER THE FALL OF THE REICH, SHE ESCAPED TO AMERICA.
"BUT OBSCURITY DID NOT SUIT HER.
"EVENTUALLY SHE NOTICED HOW MANY ANGRY PEOPLE LIVED IN THE LAND OF THE FREE.
"PEOPLE WHO WERE ONLY TOO WILLING TO ENLIST IN HER 'CAUSE.'
"BUT THIS IS THE NINETIES... SEX APPEAL IS EVERYTHING.
"SO SHE CREATED THE FICTIONAL AND NEVER SEEN EBON FLAME.
"SHE EVEN CREATED THE IDENTITY OF HER 'SON', HERVE...
"...TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE ANONYMITY THAT IS THE GREATEST APPEAL OF THE INTERNET.

"WHEN *S.H.I.E.L.D.* LEARNED THAT *FREEDOMSLIGHT* WAS GOING TO *STRIKE...*
"...YOU SENT *ME* IN TO *INVESTIGATE.* TO *STOP* THEM.
"WHEN I LEARNED NO ONE HAD EVER SEEN EBON FLAME, I DECIDED IT WOULD BE A *SIMPLE MATTER* TO *IMPERSONATE* THEIR LEADER.
MY HOPE WAS, AT THE *VERY LEAST,* I WOULD DRAW THE *WOMAN* OUT OF THE SHADOWS.
NOT *REALIZING* AT THE TIME, SHE WAS *CLOSER* THAN ANY OF US KNEW.
"*ALTERNATING* BETWEEN BLACK WIDOW AND EBON FLAME, I WAS SOON IN THE *UNENVIABLE POSITION* OF TRYING TO STOP *MYSELF.*
"*LOTTIE,* FOR *HER* PART, WAS WILLING TO *SIT BACK* AND *WATCH.*
"AT *THIS* POINT, I DID NOT KNOW SHE WAS THE *MASTERMIND* BEHIND THE FREEDOMSLIGHT MOVEMENT.
"SHE SAW MY *APPEARANCE* AS EBON FLAME AS A MEANS OF *GALVANIZING* HER FORCES.
"SHE MUST HAVE BEEN *ELATED* WHEN I ACQUIRED *THE TRIGGER.*
"NO DOUBT SHE WAS MERELY *WAITING* TO GET WHAT SHE *WANTED--*
"--THEN SHE WOULD *ULTIMATELY* GARNER HER FORCES AFTER *S.H.I.E.L.D.* WAS TAKEN OUT.

"I TOOK A GAMBLE-- AND PRESENTED *EBON FLAME* AS A *TRAITOR* TO THE CAUSE!
"I WAS *DETERMINED* TO *UNDERMINE* HER CREDIBILITY.
"SEEING ALL HER YEARS OF CAREFUL PLANNING *DESTROYED* BY EBON FLAME'S *'REVELATION'*...
"...PROVED *TOO MUCH* FOR THE *OLD WOMAN.*
"*SOON,* I FOUND MYSELF *POSING* AS LOTTIE *HERSELF.*
"GIVING A PERFORMANCE FOR A *'VERY INTERESTED'* FEDERAL EMPLOYEE.
"NATURALLY, 'LOTTIE' *ALTERED* A *FEW DETAILS* IN ORDER TO *KEEP* MY *SECRET.*
"BUT AGENT TENKO *APPARENTLY* HAD SECRETS OF HIS OWN."
CHEESE AND *CRACKER,* WIDDER!
WHEN YA WEAVE YER WEB OF *INTRIGUE* AND *DESPAIR,* YA DON'T *MESS* AROUND NONE.
I'M ONLY *SORRY* I HAVE YET TO DISCERN *WHY* HE WAS SO INTERESTED IN THE CASE.
I REQUEST *PERMISSION* TO CONTINUE THE *INVESTIGATION,* CONCENTRATING ON AGENT--
PERMISSION DENIED, TASH.
?!
BUT *WHY...?*

'CAUSE WE'RE S.H.I.E.L.D.
WE'RE ON TOP OF IT.
ONE-WAY MIRROR...
Shhhhh.
KLK
SO THAT'S YOUR RECOMMENDATION?
ABSOLUTELY, SIR. EBON FLAME IS STILL OUT THERE, AND THE FREEDOMSLIGHT MOVEMENT IS GROWING STRONGER EVERY DAY.
I THINK IT WOULD BE BEST IF I WENT IN UNDERCOVER... SEE WHAT I CAN SUSS OUT.
THEN YOU'D BE RIGHT IN THE CENTER OF THINGS, RIGHT?
IF I HAVE TO, SIR, SO BE IT.
AMERICA IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY PERSONAL SACRIFICE I HAVE TO MAKE.
I'M GLAD YOU FEEL THAT WAY.
I'LL AWAIT YOUR ORDERS, SIR.
YOU'LL BE HEARING FROM US SOON.
I'LL HAVE HIM ARRESTED IN THE PARKING LOT.

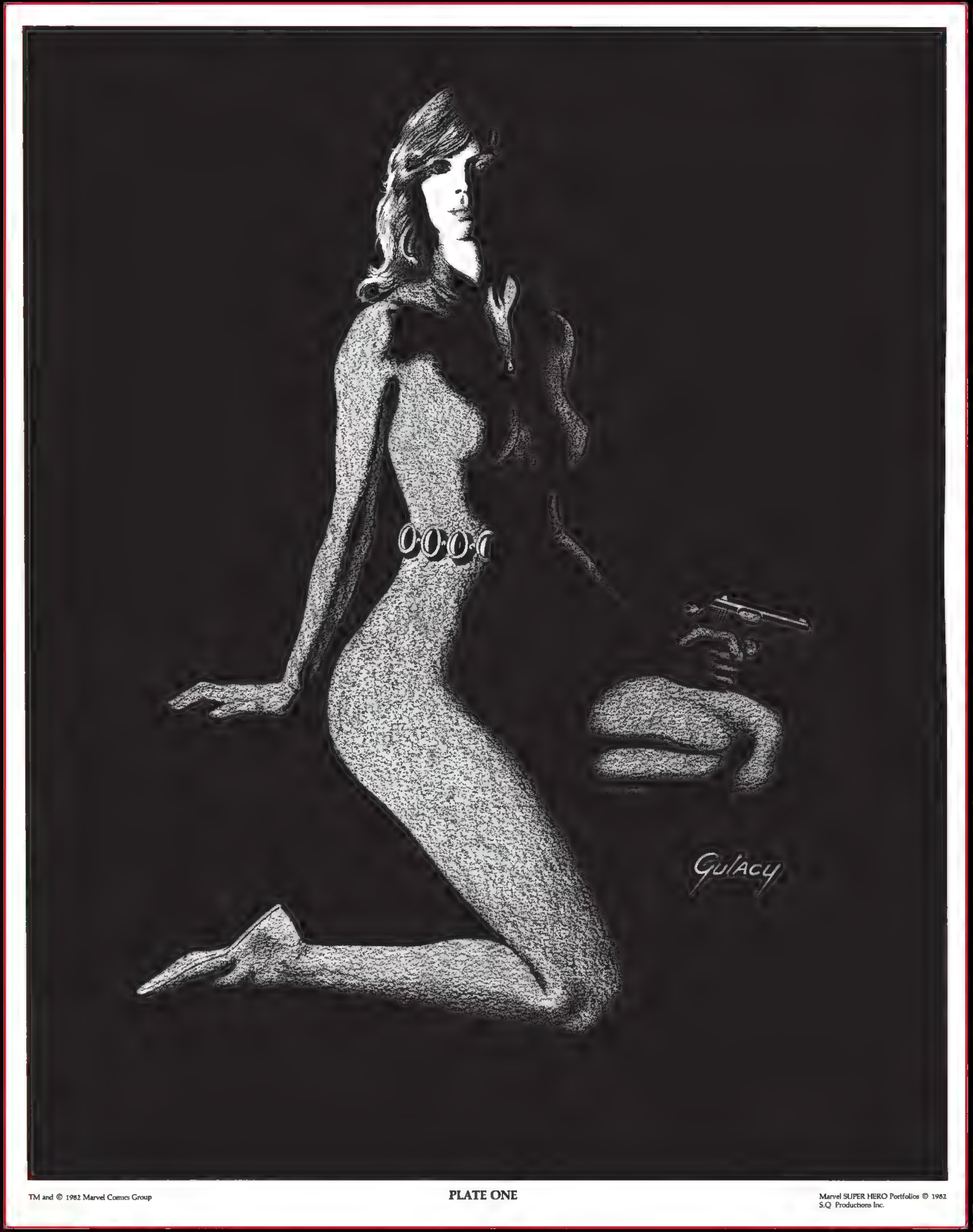
YA' SEE, LOTTIE NEEDED SOMEBODY ON THE INSIDE IN THE GOVERNMENT.
SOMEONE WHO COULD TELL HER THINGS LIKE WHERE TO FIND THE TRIGGER AND THE CEREBRAL MATRIX.
SO SHE, AS "EBON FLAME," DIDN'T KNOW AGENT TENKO WAS HER MAN...?
...ANY MORE THAN TENKO KNEW THERE WAS NEVER REALLY AN EBON FLAME.
WHEN HE HEARD FROM YOU-- AS LOTTIE-- THAT EBON FLAME TURNED OUT TO BE A DOUBLE AGENT...
...HE WAS PREPARED TO MOVE IN UNDER THE GUISE OF WORKING UNDER-COVER--
--IN ORDER TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE ENTIRE FREEDOMSLIGHT MOVEMENT FOR HIMSELF.
CONGRATS, KIDDO.
YES, CONGRATULATE ME-- FOR LYING, CHEATING AND STEALING IN ORDER TO SUCCEED.
I PREFER TO THINK OF IT AS "SPYING", NATASHA... AND YA DO GOOD WORK.
DON'T I ALWAYS?
ISN'T THAT WHY-- IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER-- THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A BLACK WIDOW?
END



BLACK WIDOW

By Paul Gulacy

BLACK WIDOW BY PAUL GULACY PORTFOLIO (1982) FEATURED SIX PLATES AND A STUNNING COVER SLEEVE BY COMICS' MASTER OF ESPIONAGE ILLUSTRATION.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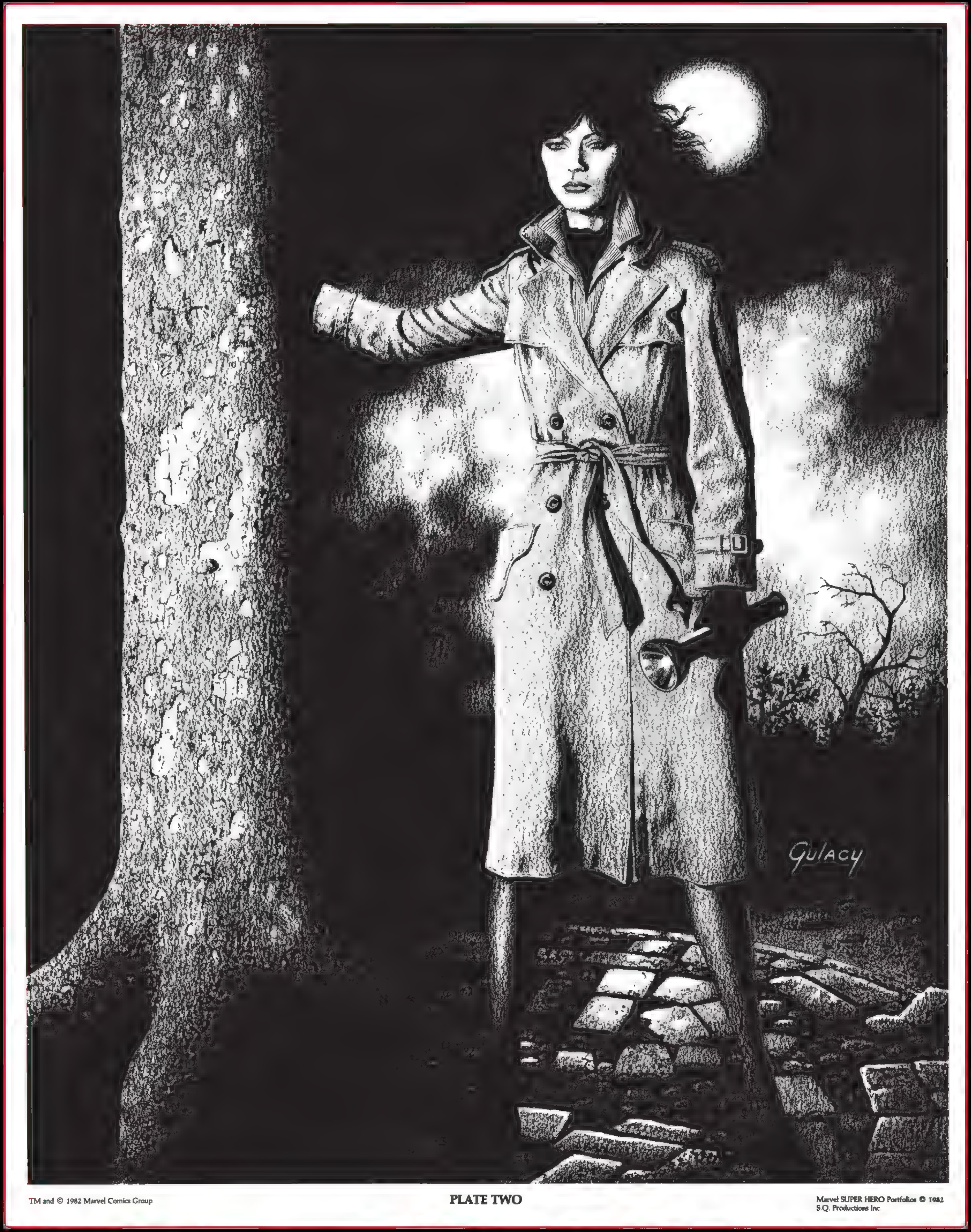
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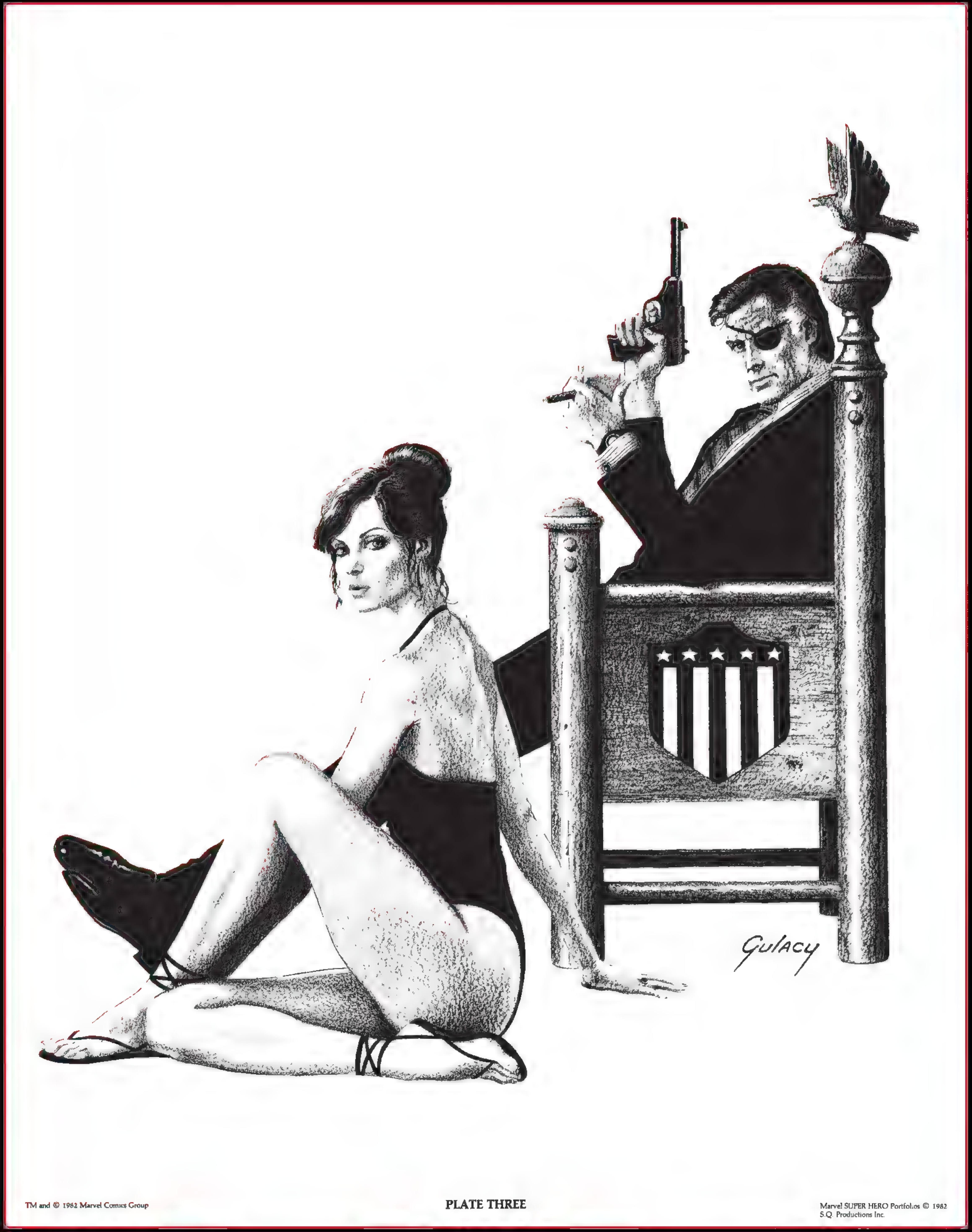
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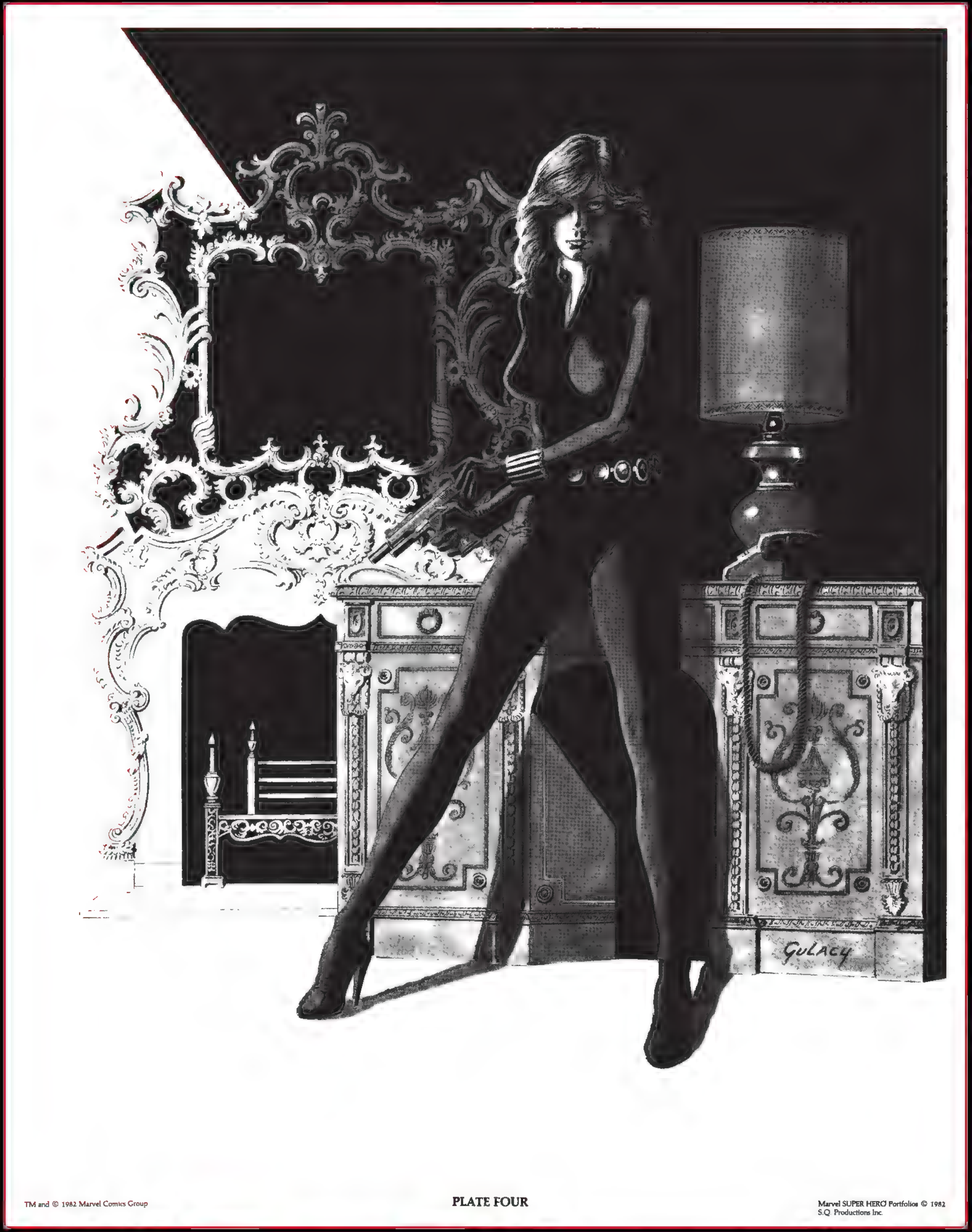
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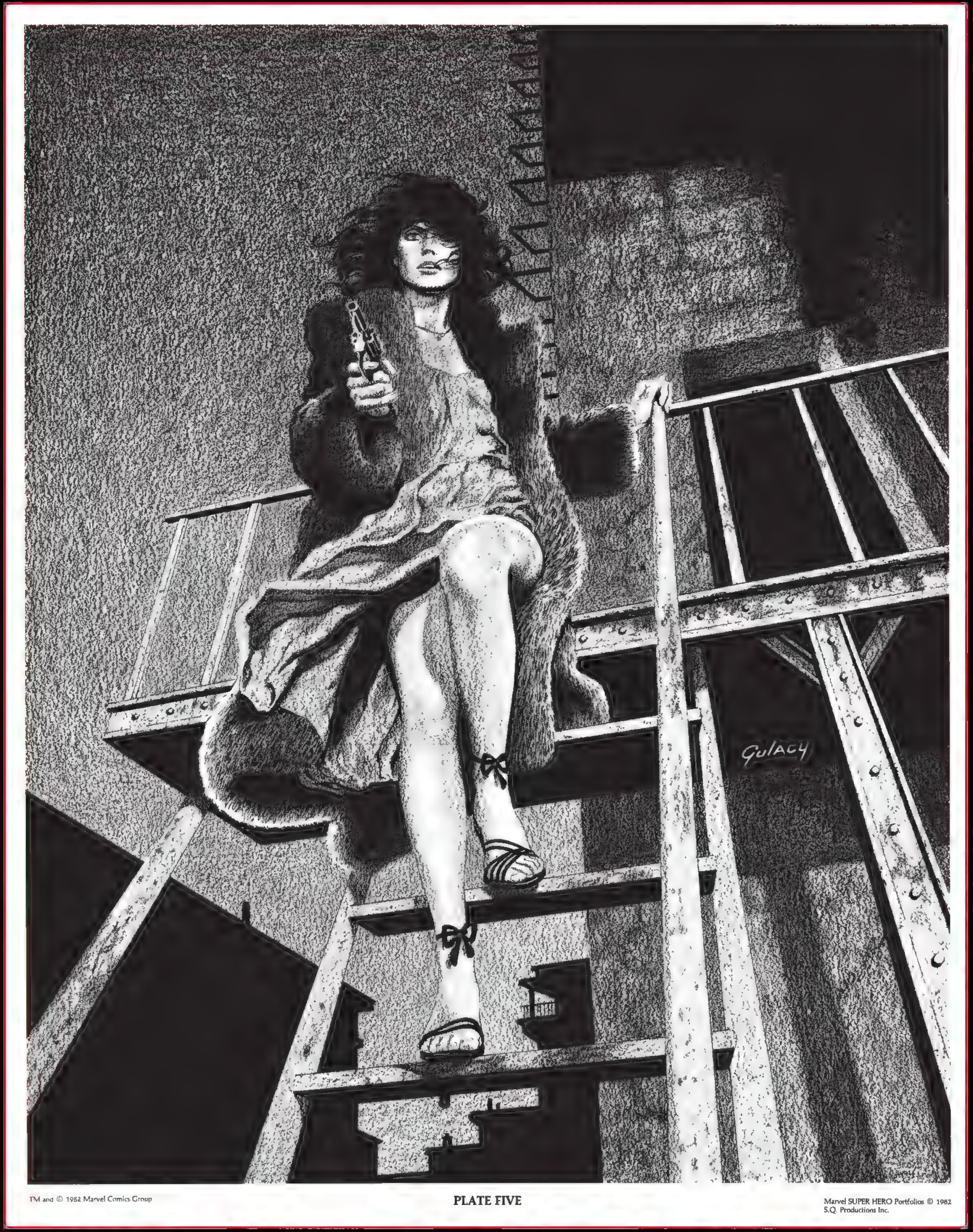
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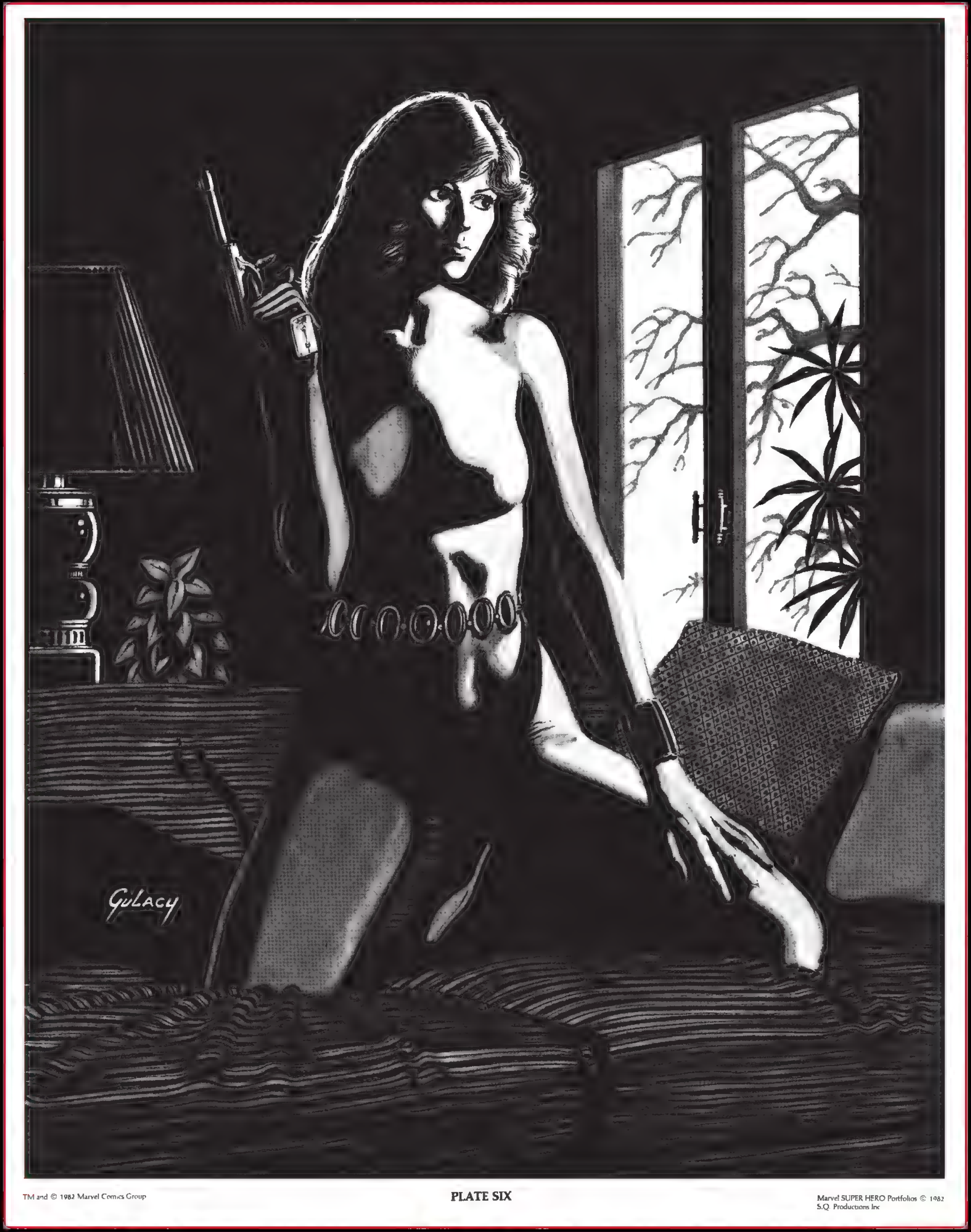
BLACK WIDOW BY PAUL GULACY PORTFOLIO (1982), PLATE FIVE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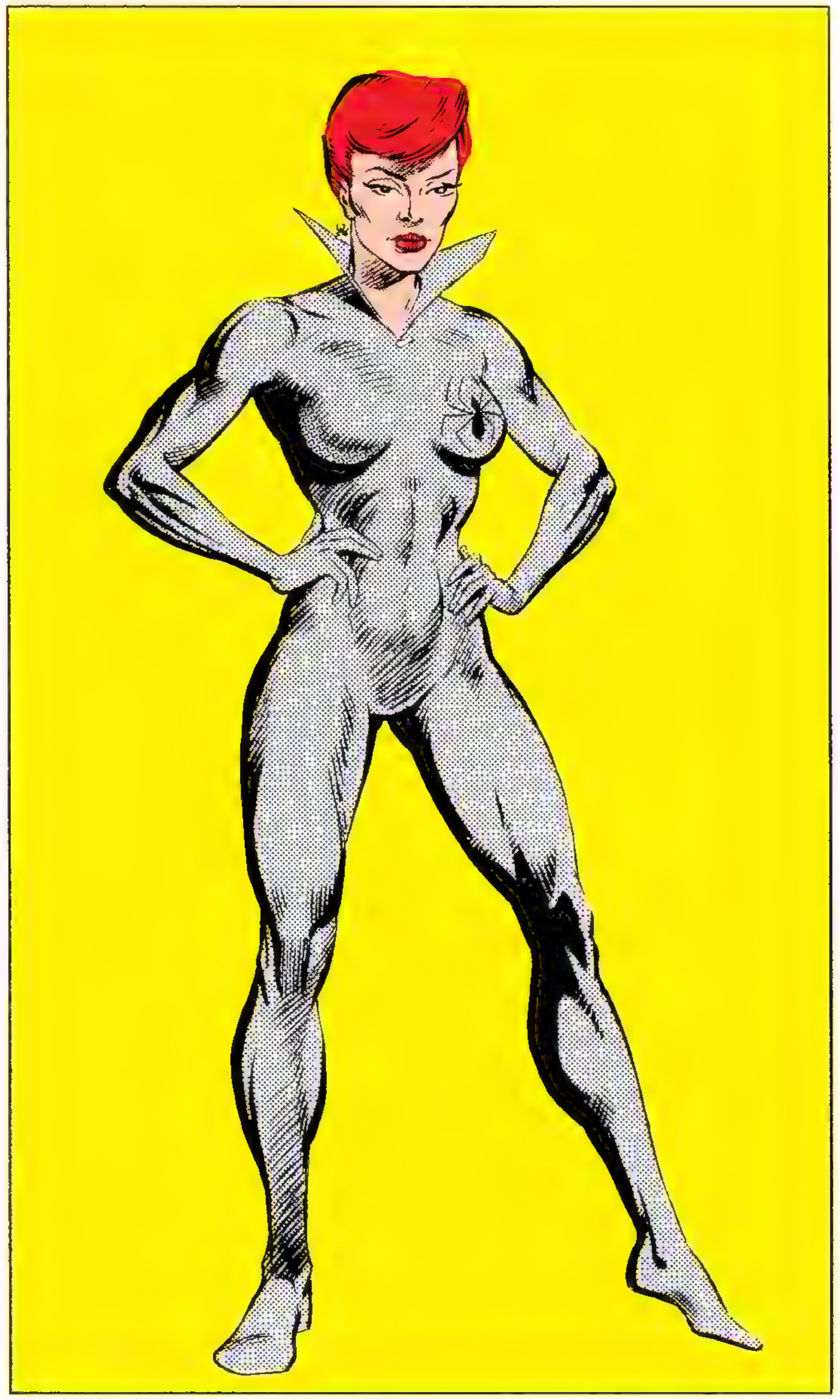
BLACK WIDOW BY PAUL GULACY PORTFOLIO (1982), PLATE SIX

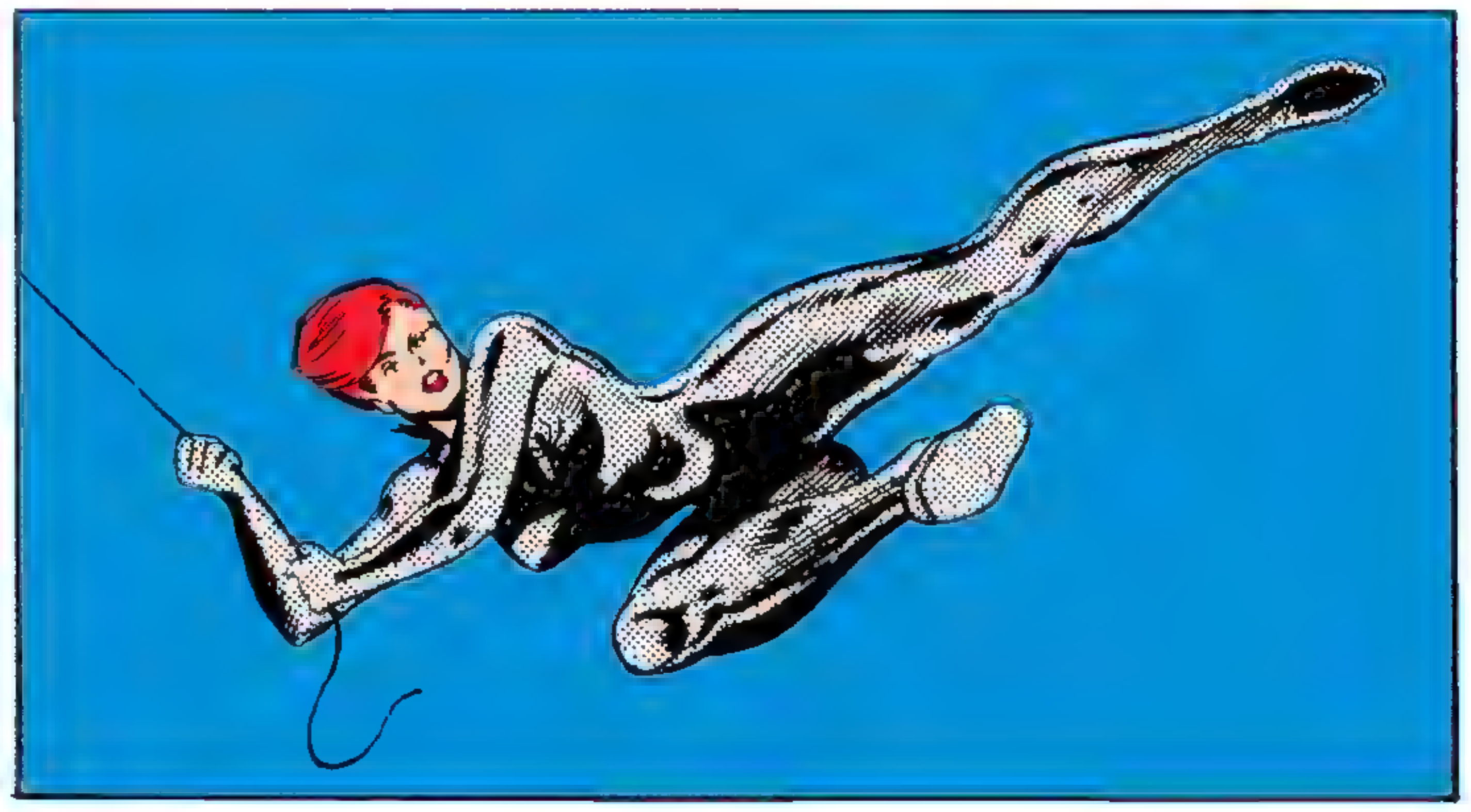
BLACK WIDOW

Real name: Natalia Alianovna Romanova ("Natasha" is the informal version of the name "Natalia," and is used by her close associates. Sometimes she has chosen to Anglicize her last name as "Romanoff." She has dropped her married name of "Shostakova.")
Occupation: Adventurer, intelligence agent, former ballerina
Legal status: Former citizen of the USSR who defected to the United States; she now lives in the United States under an extended visa authorized by SHIELD; she has a criminal record in the United States for her espionage activities for other nations, but was granted amnesty through SHIELD's intervention.
Identity: Publicly known
Place of birth: Stalingrad, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Marital status: Widowed
Known relatives: Alexi Shostakov (alias Red Guardian I, husband, deceased)
Group affiliation: Avengers reservist, frequent freelance agent of SHIELD, former partner of Daredevil, former member of the Champions of Los Angeles
Base of operations: Mobile, but she maintains a home in New York City
First appearance: TALES OF SUSPENSE #52
Origin: AVENGERS #44, DAREDEVIL #88
History: Natalia Romanova, a descendant of Russia's royal family, was found as a young child by a Russian soldier known as Ivan Petrovitch, who watched over her as she grew up and today works as her chauffeur. Romanova proved to be a brilliant scholar and athlete as she matured, and in her teens gained fame in the Soviet Union as a ballerina. She married the renowned Soviet test pilot Alexi Shostakov.

It was decided at the KGB, the department of the Soviet government which serves as its intelligence agency and secret police, that the Shostakovs would make good special operatives. While Alexi Shostakov was away on a mission, he was informed of the state's new plans for him, and told that from then on he could have no contact with any of his past friends and acquaintances, including even his own wife. Shostakov was then trained to become the Red Guardian, a costumed agent who was intended to act as the Soviet Union's counterpart to Captain America (see *Deceased: Red Guardian I*). Meanwhile, a Soviet official told Natalia Shostakova that her husband had died in the explosion of an experimental rocket he was testing. Distraught, Natalia Shostakova said that she wanted to do something to be worthy of the memory of her heroic husband. The KGB had anticipated her reaction, and trained her to become the spy known as the Black Widow.

At first the Black Widow did not act as a costumed agent. Her first major field assignment was to infiltrate Stark Industries in the United States and to assist her partner Boris Turgenov in the assassination of the defector Professor Anton Vanko (see *Crimson Dynamo*). The Black Widow was thwarted repeatedly by the original Iron Man in her various schemes against Stark Industries. The Black Widow used Hawkeye, who was then sought as a criminal and who found himself attracted to her, as an ally in some of her subversive activities (see *Hawkeye*). The Widow was given her first costume in her fourth major mission in the United States. However, her growing love for Hawkeye led to a weakening of her resolve to continue her missions for the Soviets. Hawkeye refused to act as a criminal any longer, and successfully sought amnesty and Avengers membership.

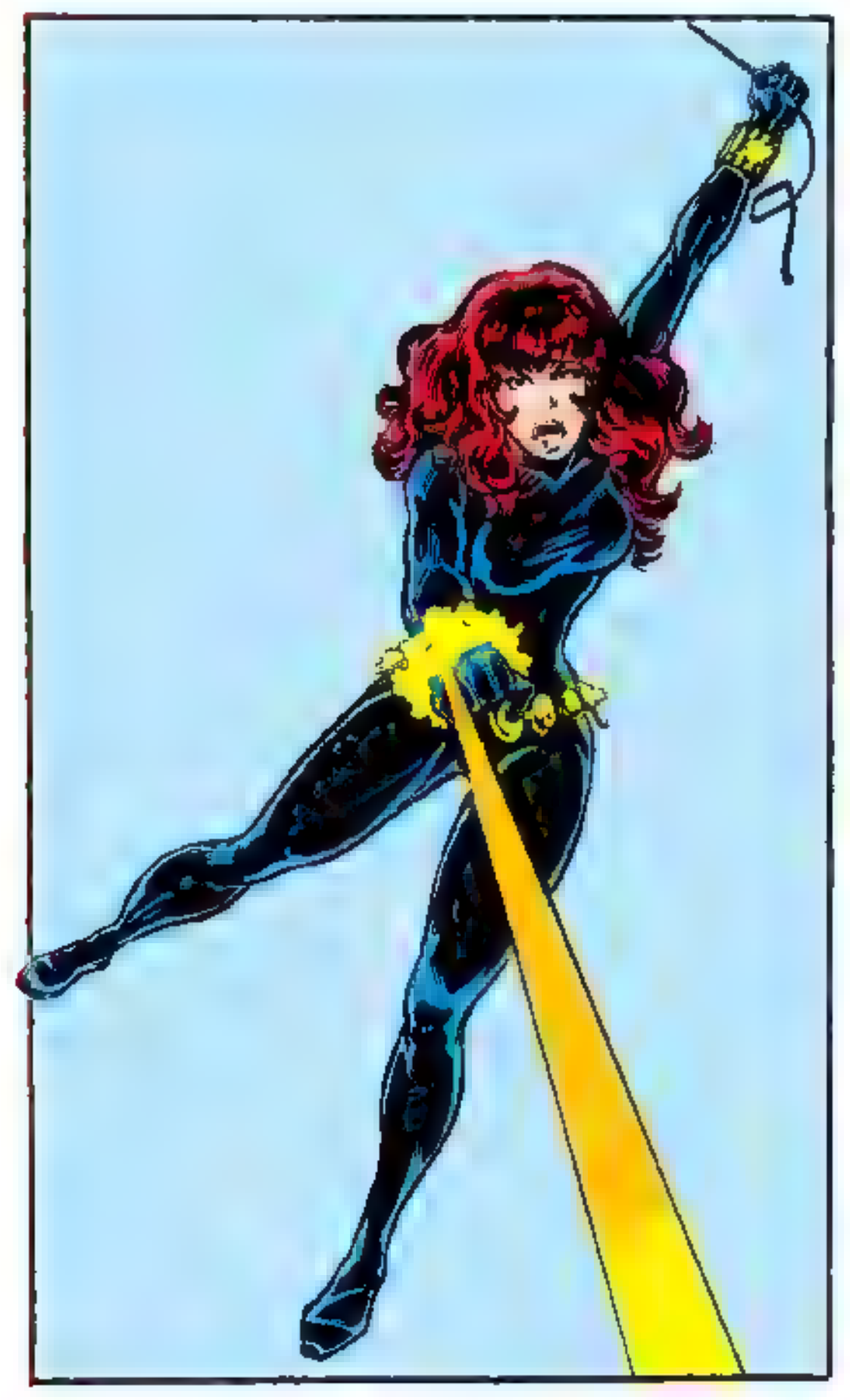


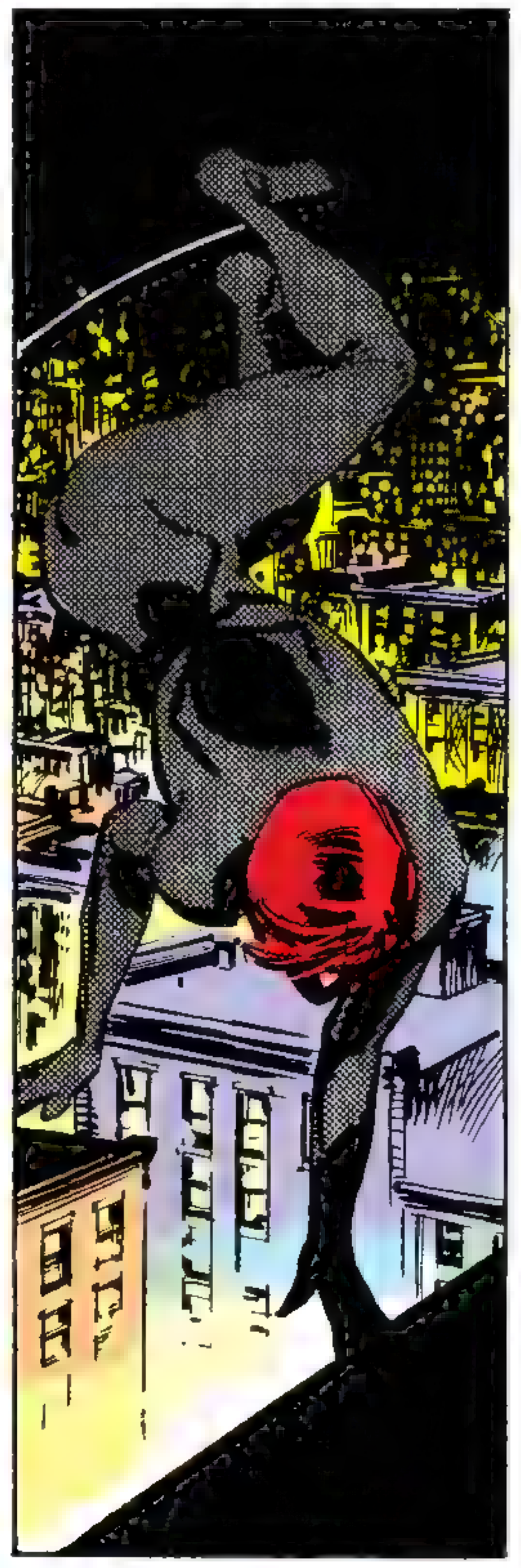


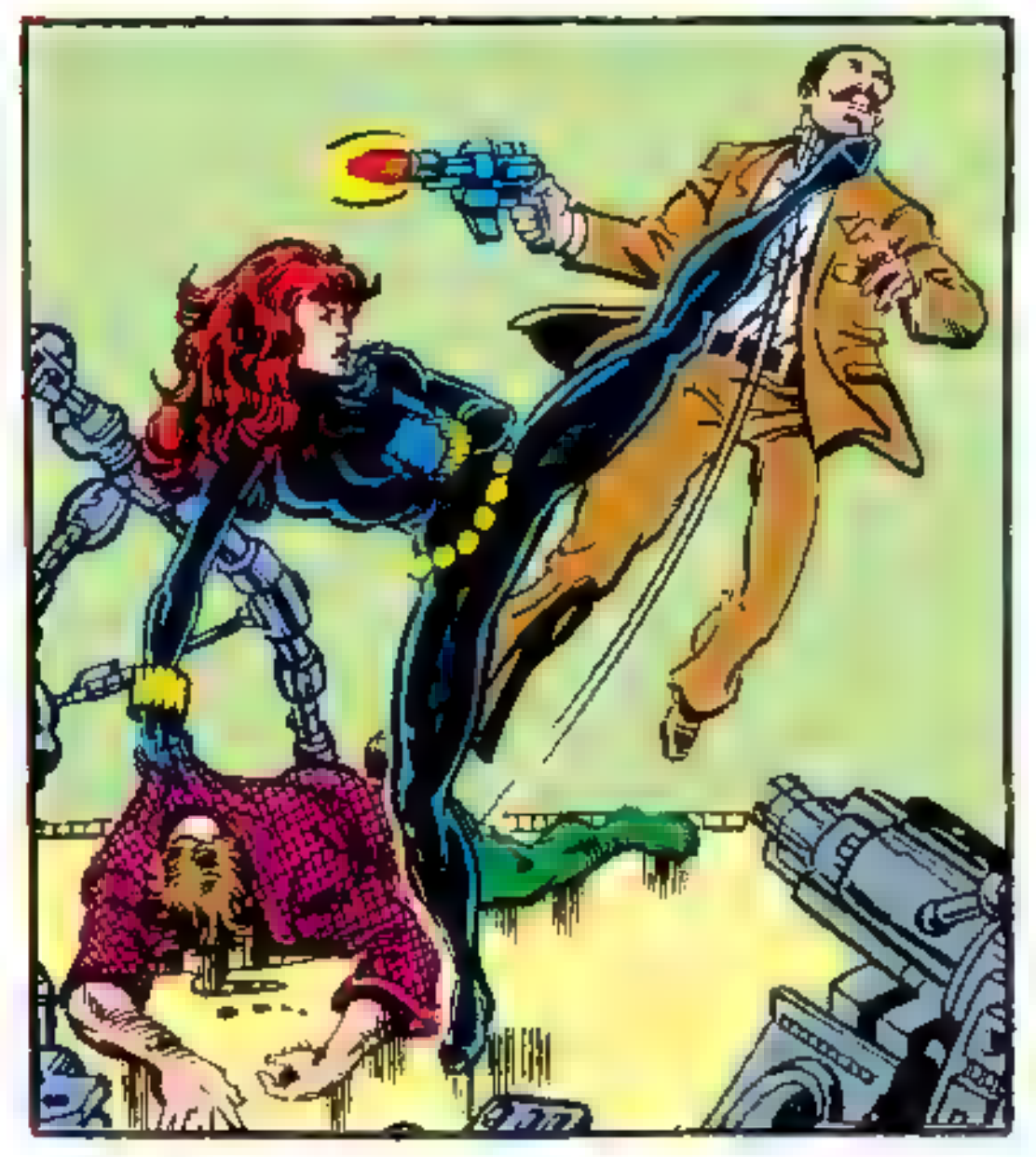
The Black Widow fell into the hands of intelligence agents of the People's Republic of China, who brainwashed her into serving them. They directed her to attack the Avengers, but she freed herself from the brainwashing, was reunited with Hawkeye, and defected to the United States. She publicly revealed her true identity and offered her services to SHIELD, which has made use of them on numerous occasions.

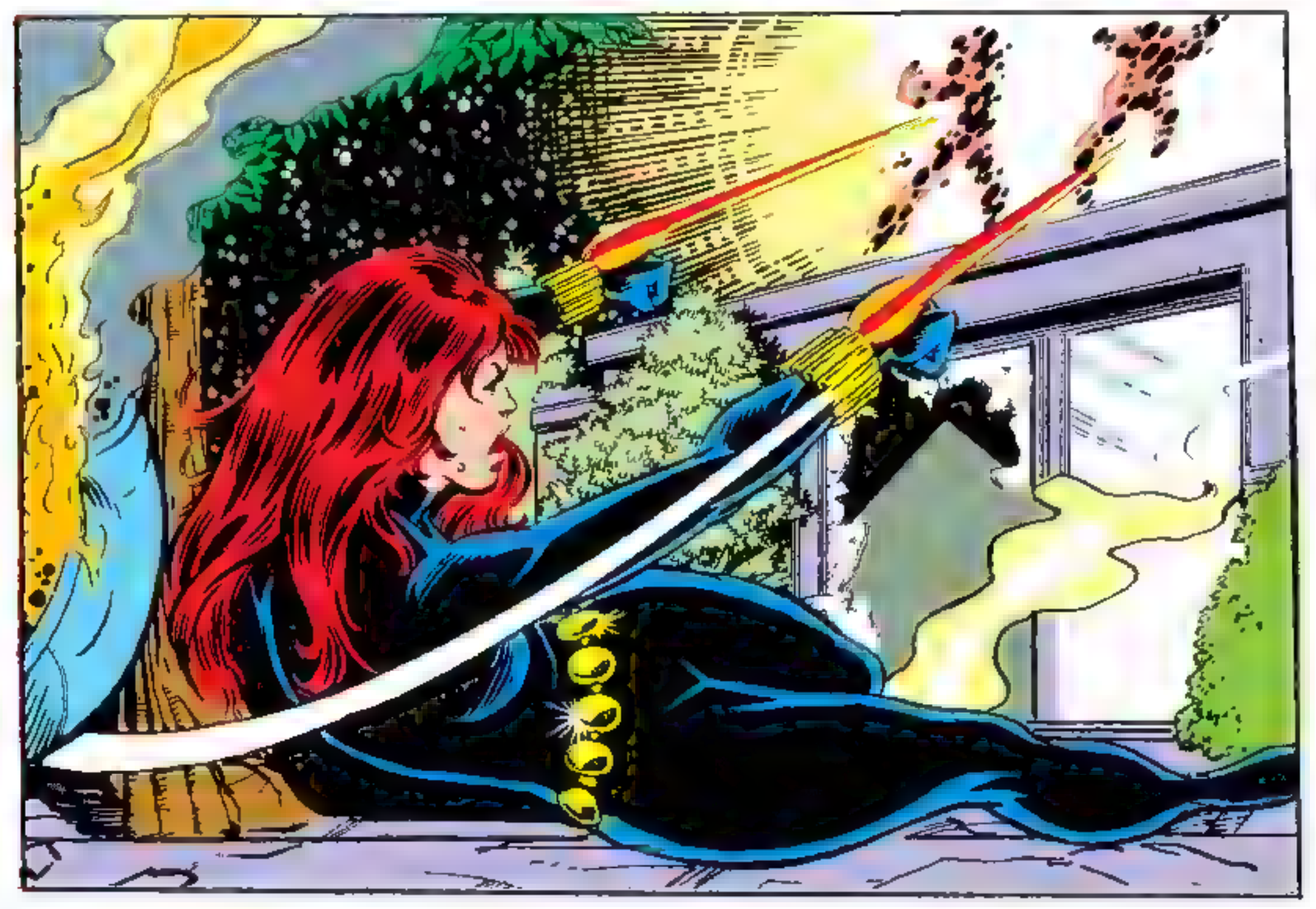
Her romance with Hawkeye ended, as did her subsequent love affair and partnership with Daredevil, although she remains friends with both men. She was a member of the Champions of Los Angeles, and serves from time to time as a member of the Avengers. She remains active as a freelance adventurer.
Height: 5′ 7″
Weight: 125 lbs.
Eyes: Blue
Hair: Red-auburn (formerly dyed black)
Strength level: The Black Widow possesses the normal human strength of a woman of her age, height, and build who engages in intensive regular exercise.
Known superhuman powers: None
Abilities: The Black Widow is an Olympic level athlete and gymnast, and a master of several martial arts, including karate, judo, akido, savate, and boxing. The Black Widow has had extensive training and experience in a great variety of espionage skills, and is considered to be one of the world's most effective and potentially dangerous secret agents.
Weapons: The Black Widow's uniform is equipped with microscopic suction cups on the portions covering her fingers and feet, activated by an electro-static charge, enabling her to stick to walls and ceilings made of standard building materials.

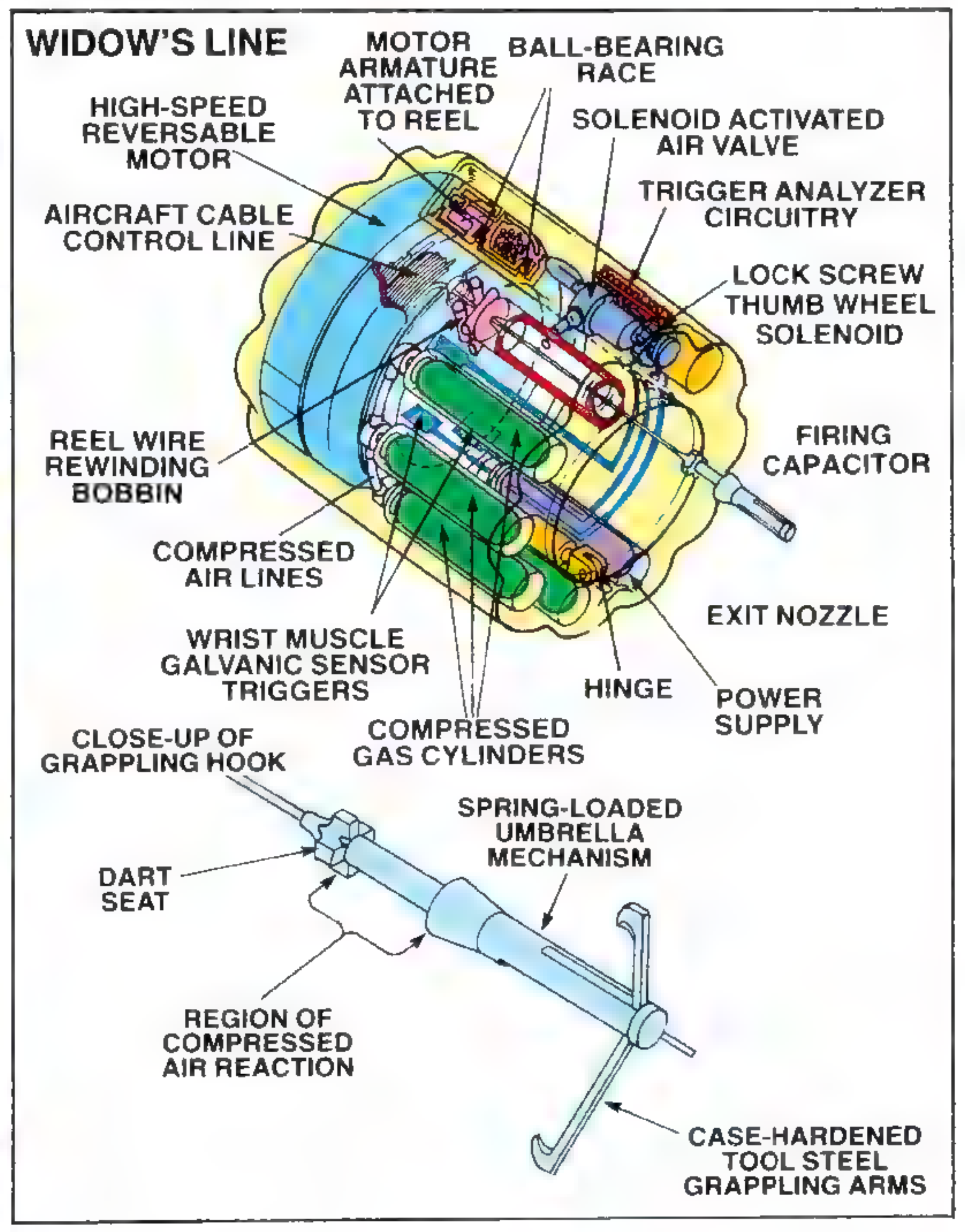
The cartridges of her wrist-bracelets contain a spring-loaded cable capable of shooting a hooked wire a hundred feet. Called her "widow's line," the cable is primarily used for swinging from building to building. The wrist-cartridges also carry a small device capable of emitting a high frequency electrostatic charge of 30,000 volts a maximum distance of ten feet. This electro-blast, called her "widow's bite," is sufficient to stun a man at twenty feet. Other cartridges in her wrist-bracelets contain tear gas pellets and a radio transmitter. She also sometimes wears a belt of metallic disc-cartridges. Each of these contains a plastic explosive equivalent to 4 pounds of TNT. ■

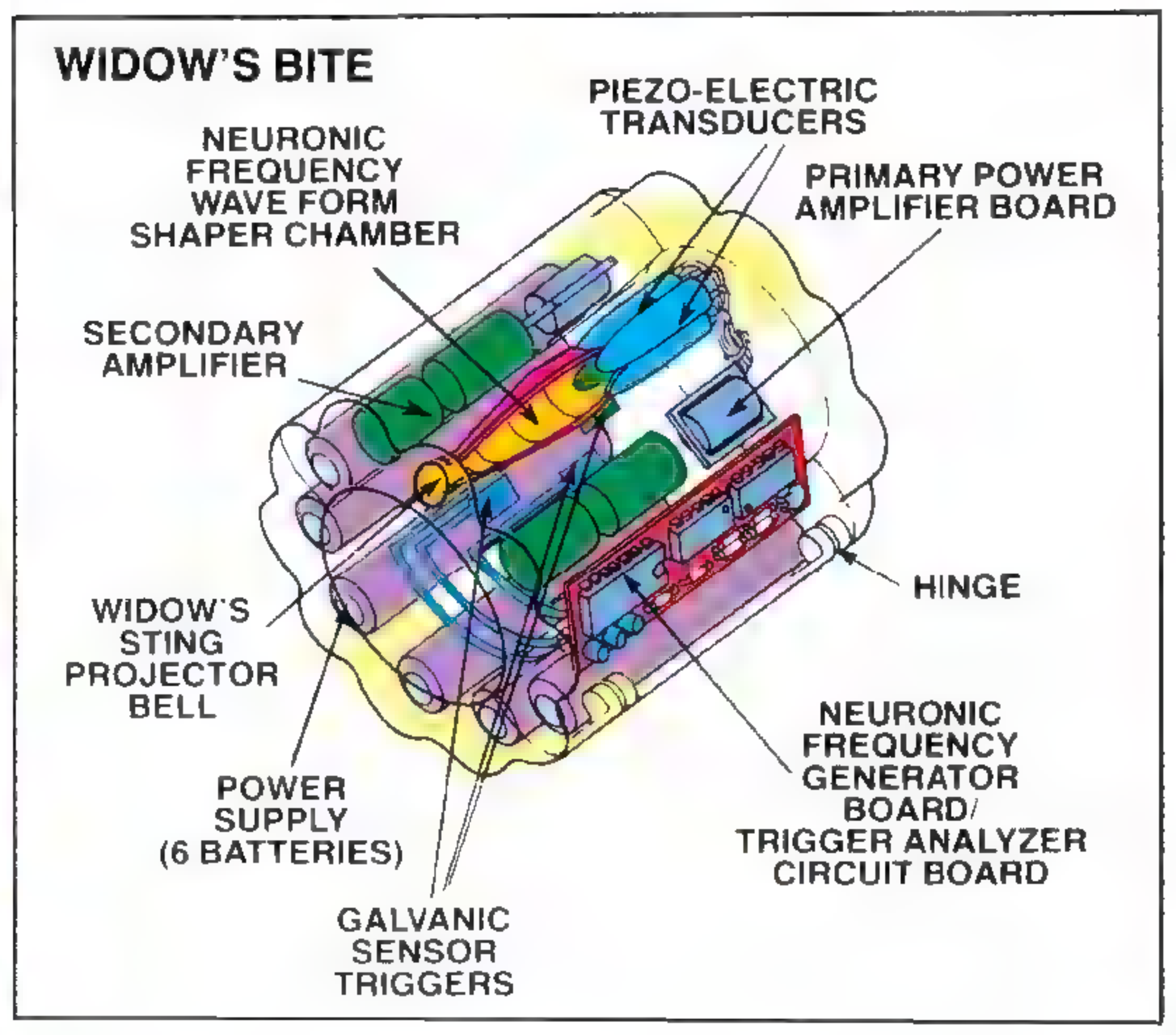






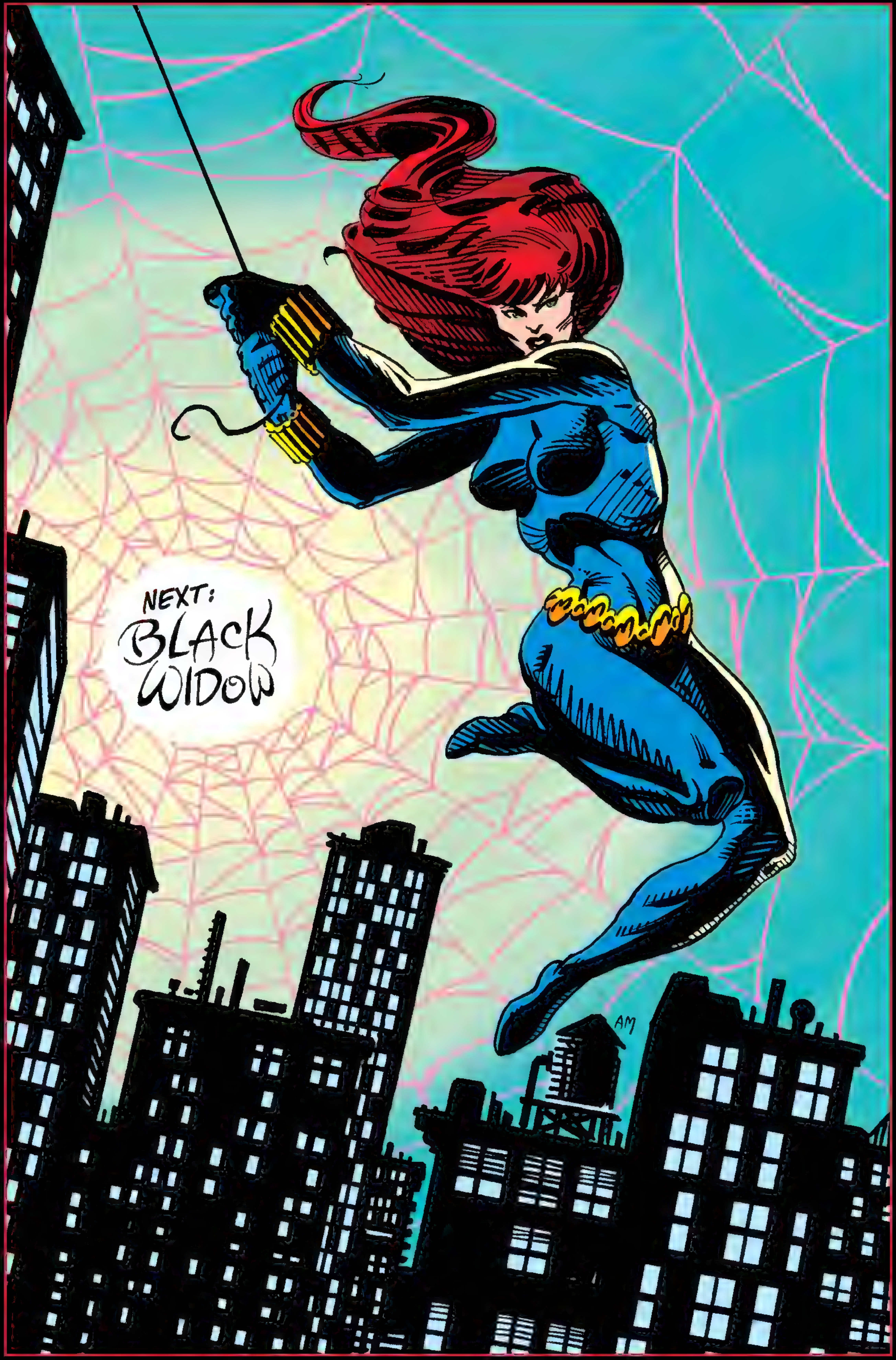



WIDOW'S LINE
MOTOR ARMATURE ATTACHED TO REEL
BALL-BEARING RACE
HIGH-SPEED REVERSABLE MOTOR
SOLENOID ACTIVATED AIR VALVE
AIRCRAFT CABLE CONTROL LINE
TRIGGER ANALYZER CIRCUITRY
LOCK SCREW THUMB WHEEL SOLENOID
REEL WIRE REWINDING BOBBIN
FIRING CAPACITOR
COMPRESSED AIR LINES
EXIT NOZZLE
WRIST MUSCLE GALVANIC SENSOR TRIGGERS
HINGE
POWER SUPPLY
CLOSE-UP OF GRAPPLING HOOK
COMPRESSED GAS CYLINDERS
SPRING-LOADED UMBRELLA MECHANISM
DART SEAT
REGION OF COMPRESSED AIR REACTION
CASE-HARDENED TOOL STEEL GRAPPLING ARMS


WIDOW'S BITE
PIEZO-ELECTRIC TRANSDUCERS
NEURONIC FREQUENCY WAVE FORM SHAPER CHAMBER
PRIMARY POWER AMPLIFIER BOARD
SECONDARY AMPLIFIER
HINGE
WIDOW'S STING PROJECTOR BELL
NEURONIC FREQUENCY GENERATOR BOARD/ TRIGGER ANALYZER CIRCUIT BOARD
POWER SUPPLY (6 BATTERIES)
GALVANIC SENSOR TRIGGERS

THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE: DELUXE EDITION #2 (JANUARY 1986), BLACK WIDOW ENTRY

WRITTEN BY MARK GRUENWALD & PETER SANDERSON; CHARACTER KEY ART BY FRANK MILLER & JOSEF RUBINSTEIN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BLACK WIDOW
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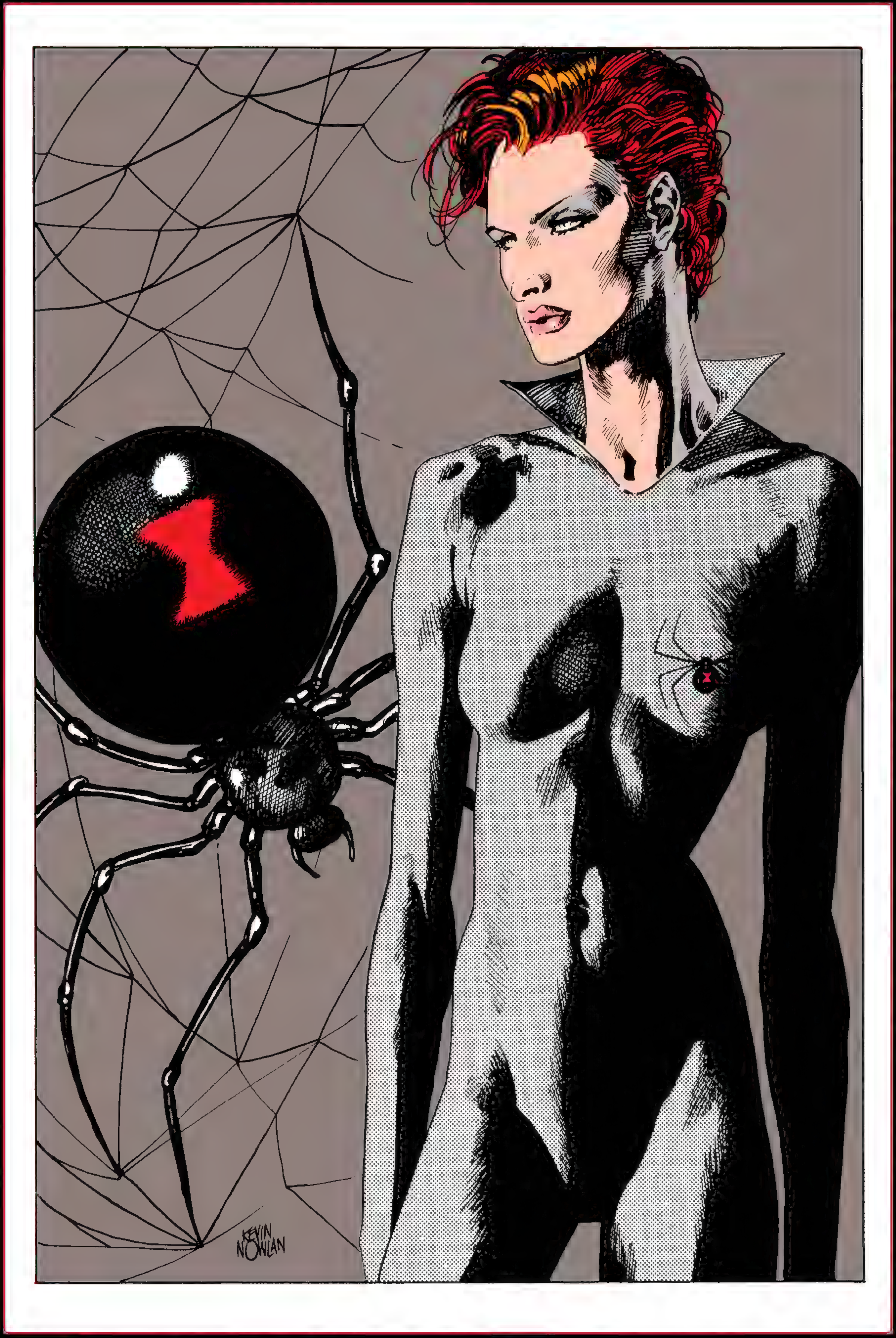
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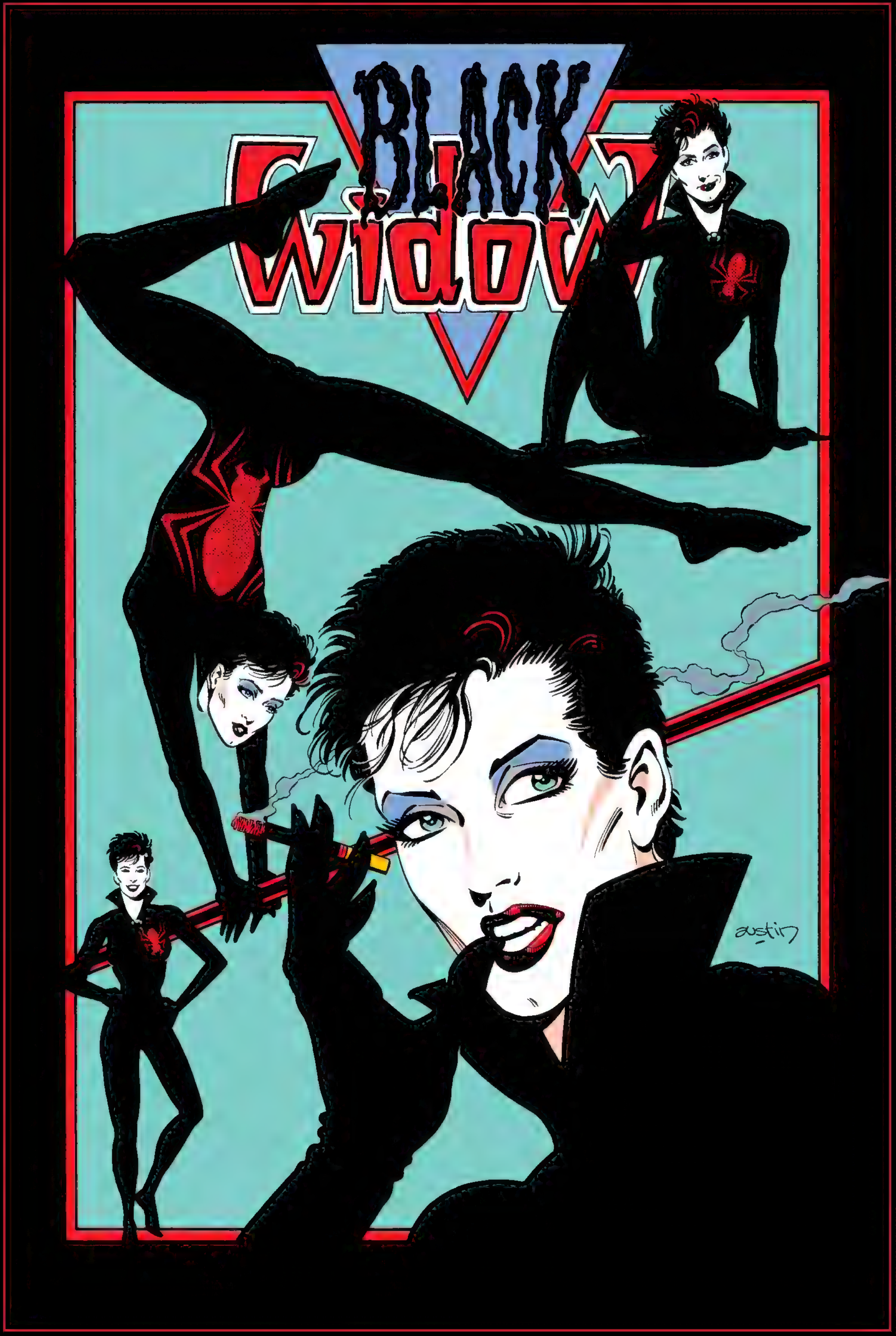
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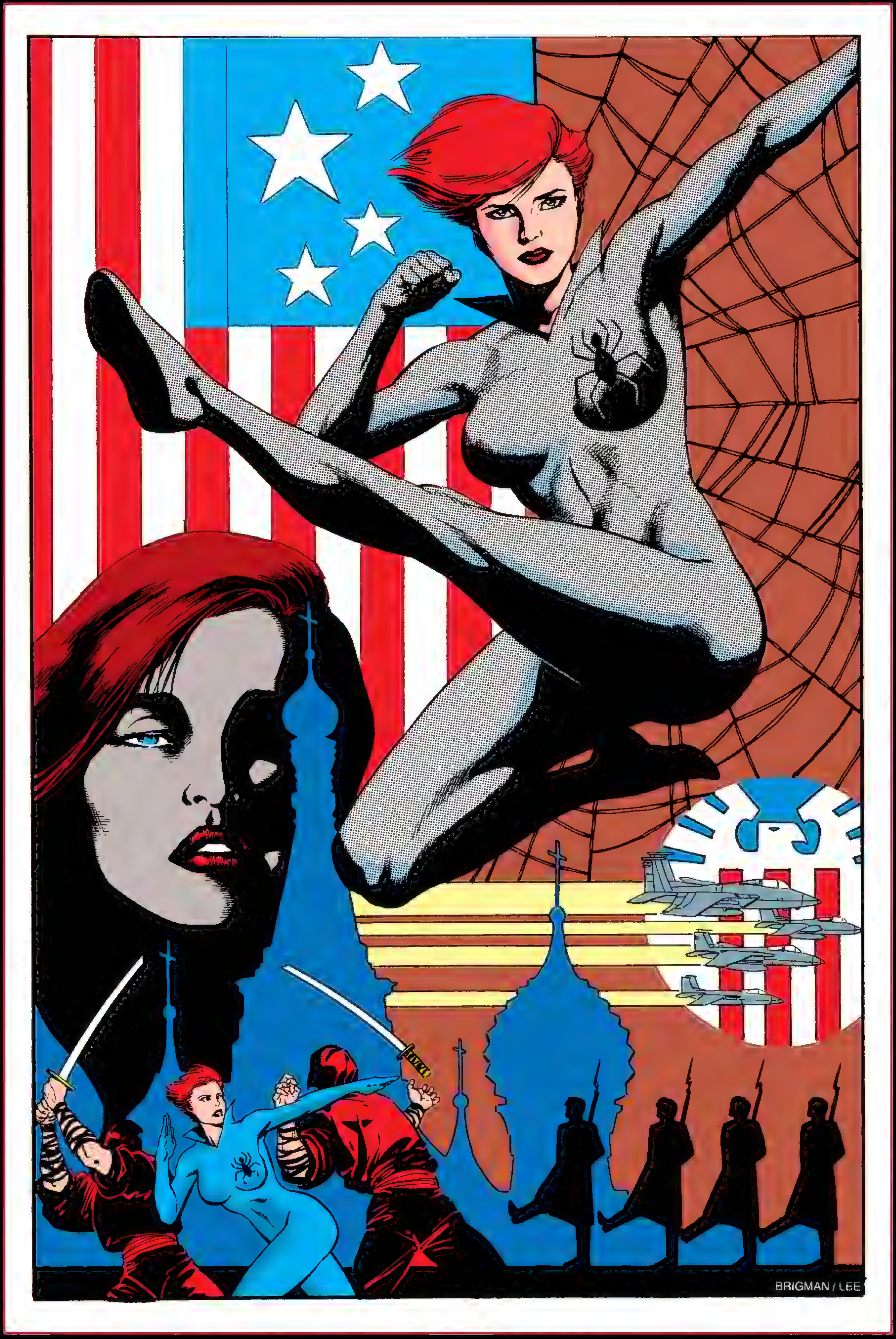
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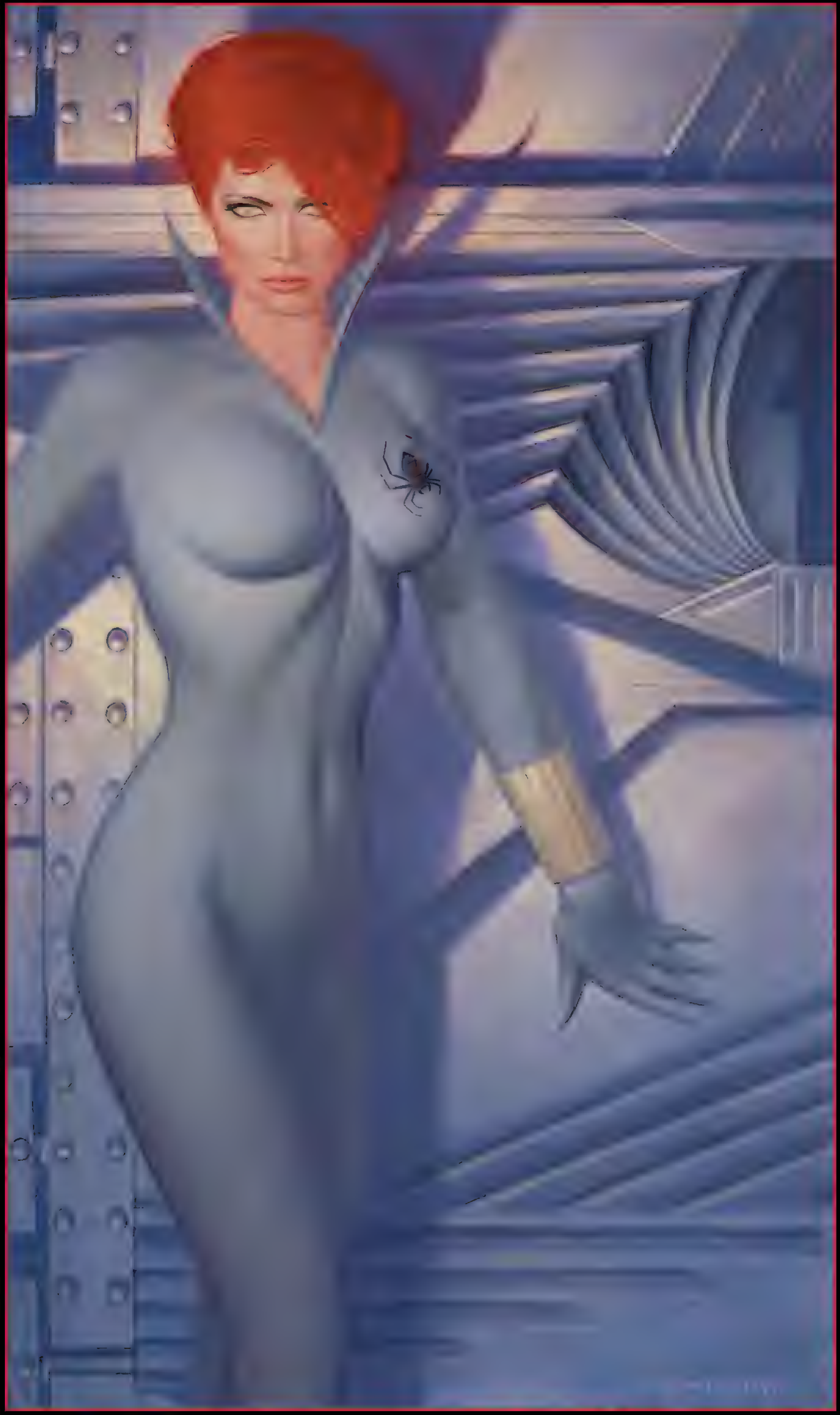
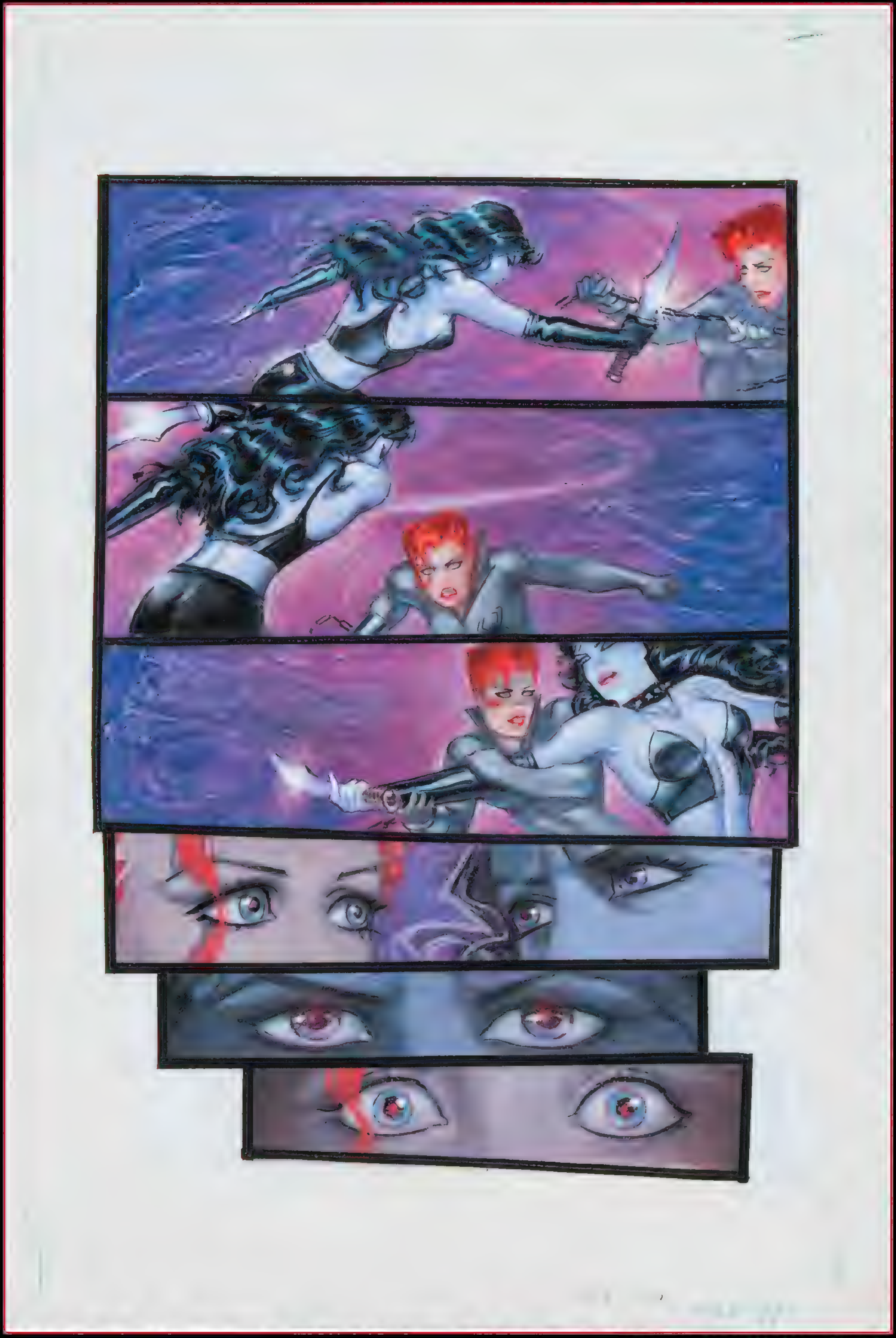


MARVEL PRESS BLACK WIDOW POSTER (1991), BY JOE CHIODO



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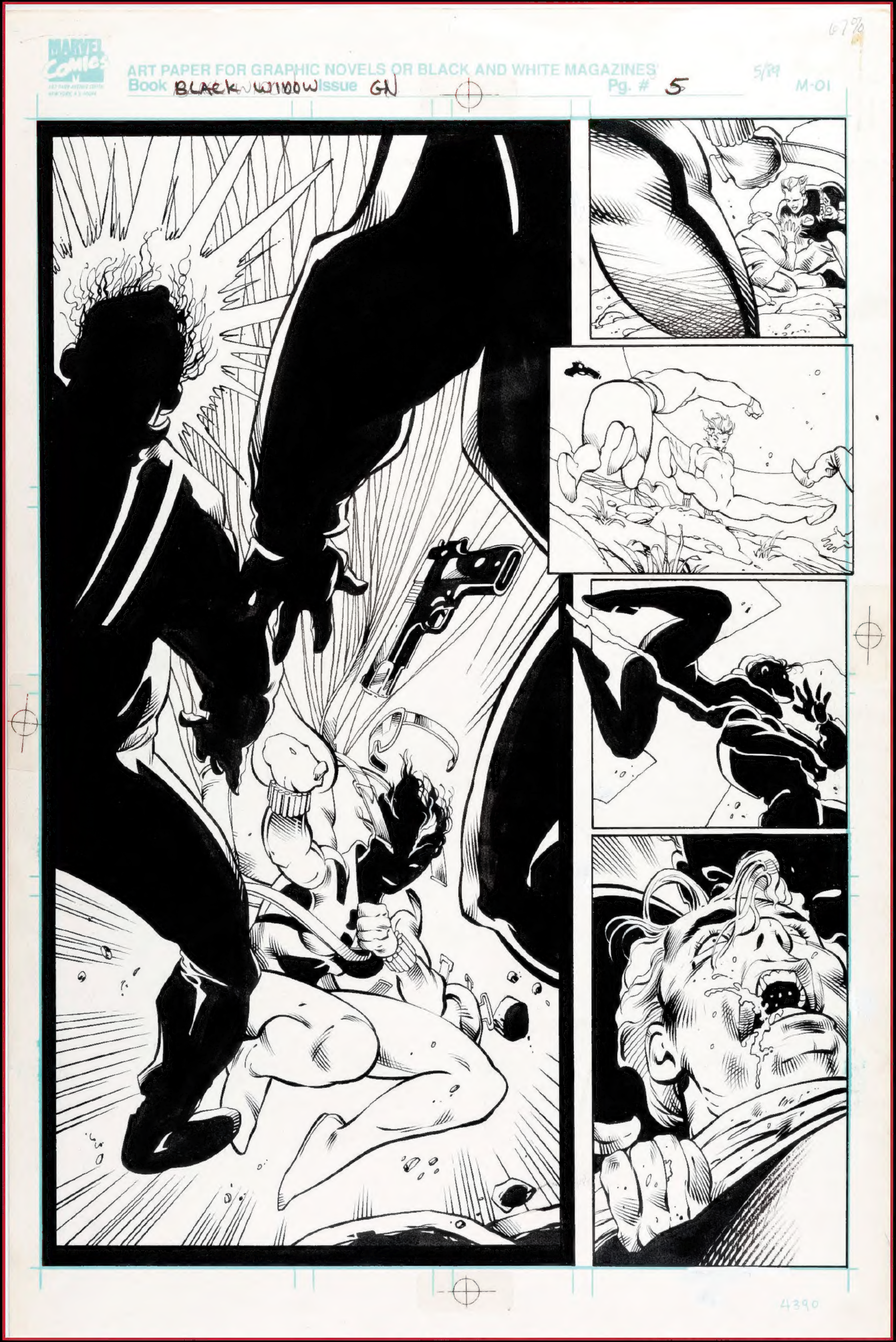
DAREDEVIL/BLACK WIDOW: ABATTOIR, PAGE 55 ORIGINAL ART, BY JOE CHIODO



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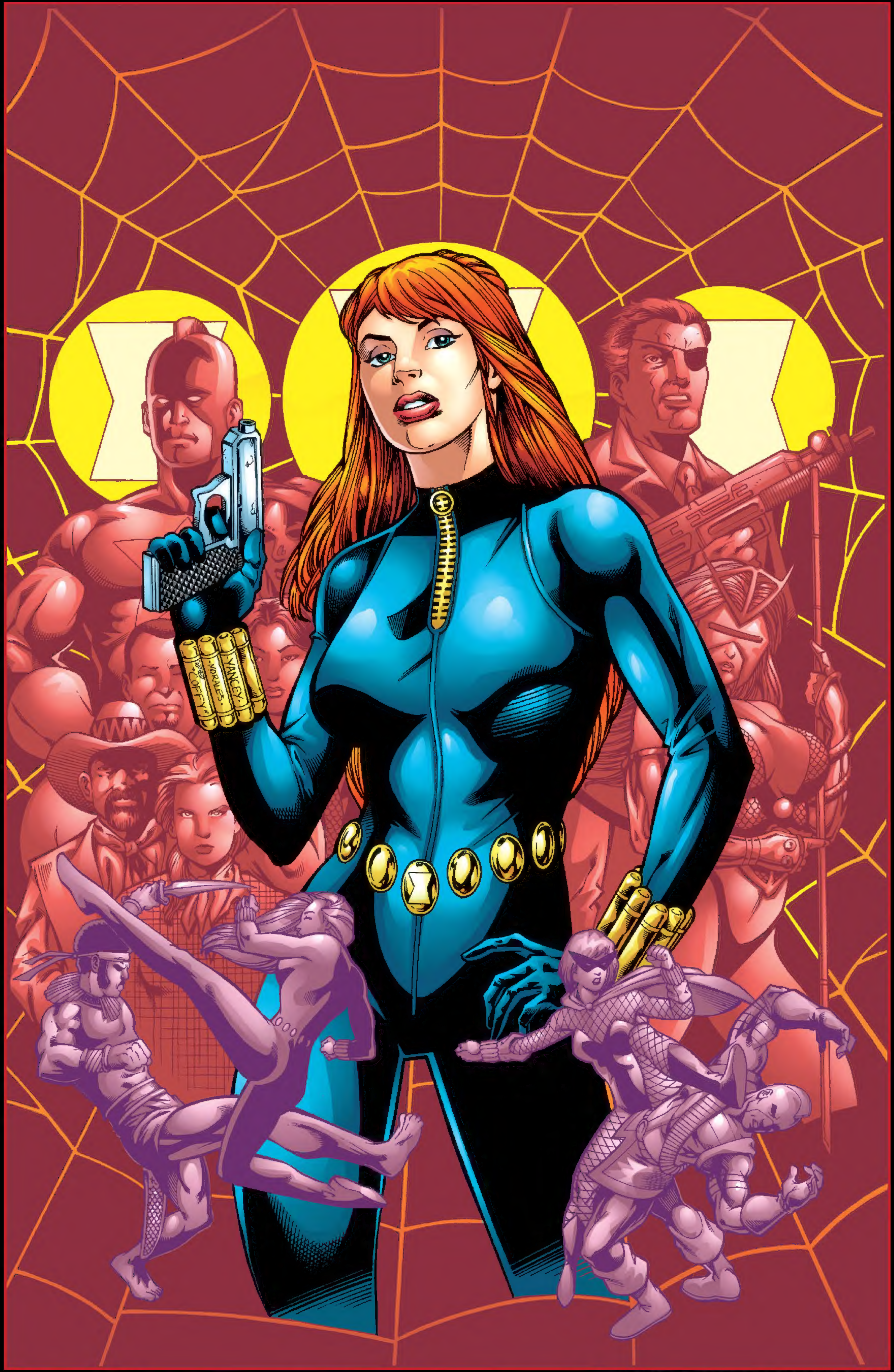
PUNISHER/BLACK WIDOW: SPINNING DOOMSDAY'S WEB, PAGE 5 ORIGINAL ART, BY LARRY STROMAN & MARK FARMER



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REPRINTING *MARVEL FANFARE* #10-13

BLACK WIDOW: WEB OF INTRIGUE (1991), COVER, BY YANCY LABAT, MARK MORALES & STEVE BUCCELLATO

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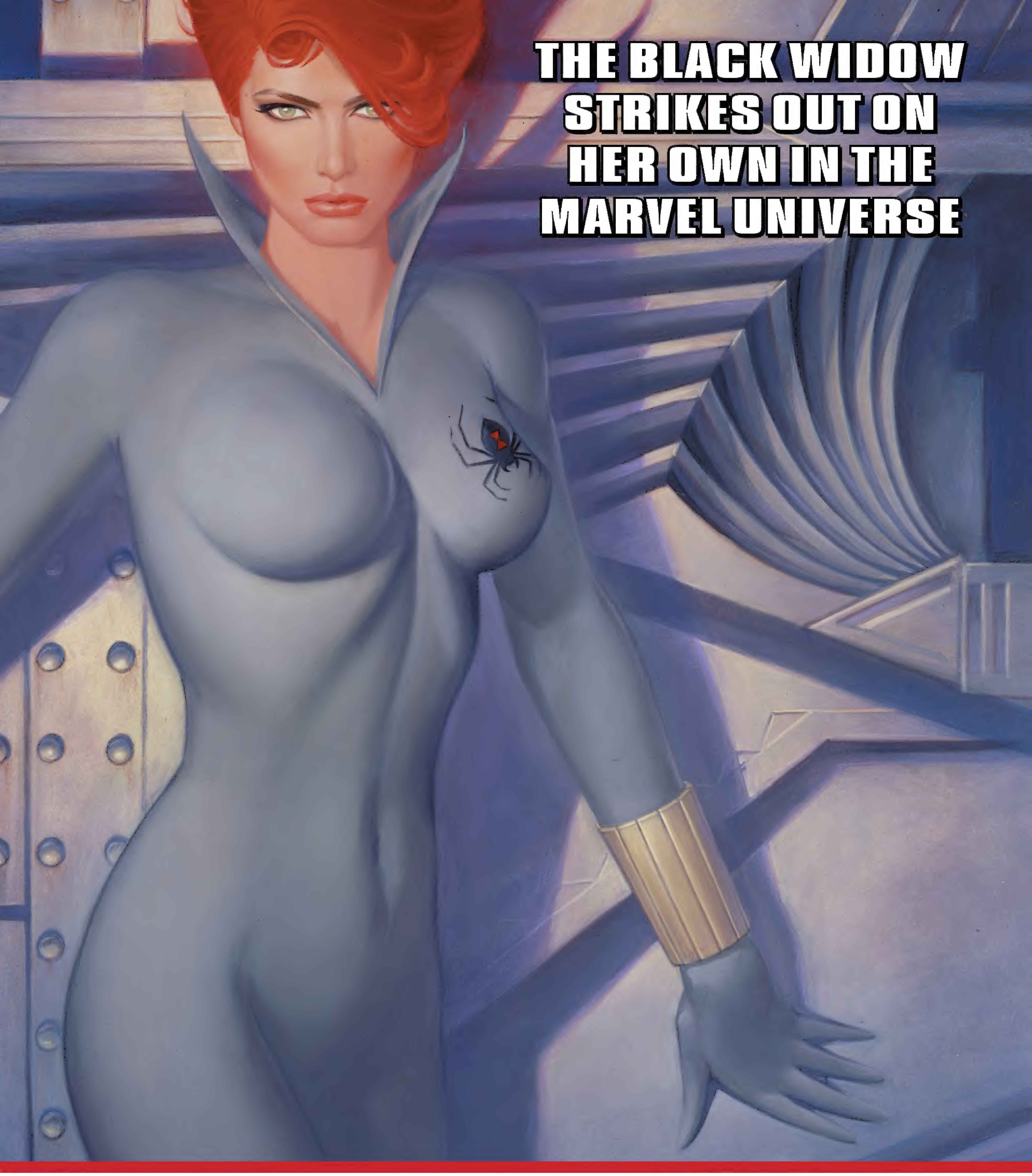
REPRINTING *BIZARRE ADVENTURES* #25, *MARVEL FANFARE* #10-13 & *BLACK WIDOW: THE COLDEST WAR*

BLACK WIDOW: WEB OF INTRIGUE **PREMIERE CLASSIC HARDCOVER (2010), COVER,**
BY GEORGE PÉREZ, BOB LAYTON & TOM SMITH

THE BLACK WIDOW STRIKES OUT ON HER OWN IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE



The Black Widow sets out on her own in a series of solo adventures that defined her as one of Marvel's greatest heroes! Writer Ralph Macchio begins with a tense secret-agent tale stunningly illustrated by Paul Gulacy. Then, with artist George Pérez, Macchio spins one of the most beloved Black Widow stories of all time for *Marvel Fanfare*. Next, a series of graphic novels explores the darkest corners of the Marvel Universe. A revelation regarding the Red Guardian draws Black Widow back into the web of Russian spymasters; she teams with the Punisher to take down a rogue former government agent; she reunites with Daredevil to investigate the murder of S.H.I.E.L.D. ESPer agents; and she returns to post-Soviet Russia with Nick Fury.

BIZARRE ADVENTURES #25, MARVEL FANFARE #10-13, SOLO AVENGERS #7,
BLACK WIDOW: THE COLDEST WAR, PUNISHER/BLACK WIDOW: SPINNING DOOMSDAY'S WEB,
DAREDEVIL/BLACK WIDOW: ABATTOIR, MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #135, DAREDEVIL ANNUAL #10,
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